TALES OF MEAN STREETS

BY

ARTHUR MORRISON

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TALES OF MEAN STREETS

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LIZERUNT
SQUIRE NAPPER
WITHOUT VISIBLE MEANS
THREE ROUNDS

AND OTHERS

BY

ARTHUR MORRISON

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TO

WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY

NOTE.—*The greater number of these stories and studies were first printed in* The National Observer; *the introduction, in a slightly different form, in* Macmillan's Magazine; '*That Brute Simmons*' *and* '*A Conversion*' *have been published in* The Pall Mall Budget; *and* '*The Red Cow Group*' *is new.*

INTRODUCTION

A STREET

THIS street is in the East End. There is no need to say in the East End of what. The East End is a vast city, as famous in its way as any the hand of man has made. But who knows the East End? It is down through Cornhill and out beyond Leadenhall Street and Aldgate Pump, one will say: a shocking place, where he once went with a curate; an evil plexus of slums that hide human creeping things; where filthy men and

women live on penn'orths of gin, where collars and clean shirts are decencies unknown, where every citizen wears a black eye, and none ever combs his hair. The East End is a place, says another, which is given over to the Unemployed. And the Unemployed is a race whose token is a clay pipe, and whose enemy is soap: now and again it migrates bodily to Hyde Park with banners, and furnishes adjacent police courts with disorderly drunks. Still another knows the East End only as the place whence begging letters come; there are coal and blanket funds there, all perennially insolvent, and everybody always wants a day in the country. Many and misty are people's notions of the East End; and each is commonly but the distorted shadow of a minor feature. Foul slums

there are in the East End, of course, as there are in the West; want and misery there are, as wherever a host is gathered together to fight for food. But they are not often spectacular in kind.

Of this street there are about one hundred and fifty yards—on the same pattern all. It is not pretty to look at. A dingy little brick house twenty feet high, with three square holes to carry the windows, and an oblong hole to carry the door, is not a pleasing object; and each side of this street is formed by two or three score of such houses in a row, with one front wall in common. And the effect is as of stables.

Round the corner there are a baker's, a chandler's, and a beer-shop. They are not included in the view from any of the rectangular holes; but they are well known

to every denizen, and the chandler goes to church on Sunday and pays for his seat. At the opposite end, turnings lead to streets less rigidly respectable: some where 'Mangling done here' stares from windows, and where doors are left carelessly open; others where squalid women sit on doorsteps, and girls go to factories in white aprons. Many such turnings, of as many grades of decency, are set between this and the nearest slum.

They are not a very noisy or obtrusive lot in this street. They do not go to Hyde Park with banners, and they seldom fight. It is just possible that one or two among them, at some point in a life of ups and downs, may have been indebted to a coal and blanket fund; but whosoever these may be, they would rather die than publish the disgrace, and it is prob-

able that they very nearly did so ere submitting to it.

Some who inhabit this street are in the docks, some in the gasworks, some in one or other of the few shipbuilding yards that yet survive on the Thames. Two families in a house is the general rule, for there are six rooms behind each set of holes: this, unless 'young men lodgers' are taken in, or there are grown sons paying for bed and board. As for the grown daughters, they marry as soon as may be. Domestic service is a social descent, and little under millinery and dressmaking is compatible with self-respect. The general servant may be caught young among the turnings at the end where mangling is done; and the factory girls live still further off, in places skirting slums.

Every morning at half-past five there is a curious demonstration. The street resounds with thunderous knockings, repeated upon door after door, and acknowledged ever by a muffled shout from within. These signals are the work of the night-watchman or the early policeman, or both, and they summon the sleepers to go forth to the docks, the gasworks, and the ship-yards. To be awakened in this wise costs fourpence a week, and for this fourpence a fierce rivalry rages between night-watchmen and policemen. The night-watchman—a sort of by-blow of the ancient 'Charley,' and himself a fast vanishing quantity—is the real professional performer; but he goes to the wall, because, a large connection must be worked if the pursuit is to pay at four-fourpence a knocker. Now, it is not easy

to bang at two knockers three-quarters of a mile apart, and a hundred others lying between, all punctually at half-past five. Wherefore the policeman, to whom the fourpence is but a perquisite, and who is content with a smaller round, is rapidly supplanting the night-watchman, whose cry of 'Past nine o'clock,' as he collects orders in the evening, is now seldom heard.

The knocking and the shouting pass, and there comes the noise of opening and shutting of doors, and a clattering away to the docks, the gasworks and the ship-yards. Later more door-shutting is heard, and then the trotting of sorrow-laden little feet along the grim street to the grim Board School three grim streets off. Then silence, save for a subdued sound of scrubbing here and there, and the puny squall of croupy infants. After this, a new trotting

of little feet to docks, gasworks, and ship-yards with father's dinner in a basin and a red handkerchief, and so to the Board School again. More muffled scrubbing and more squalling, and perhaps a feeble attempt or two at decorating the blankness of a square hole here and there by pouring water into a grimy flower-pot full of dirt. Then comes the trot of little feet toward the oblong holes, heralding the slower tread of sooty artisans; a smell of bloater up and down; nightfall; the fighting of boys in the street, perhaps of men at the corner near the beer-shop; sleep. And this is the record of a day in this street; and every day is hopelessly the same.

Every day, that is, but Sunday. On Sunday morning a smell of cooking floats round the corner from the half-shut baker's, and the little feet trot down the street

under steaming burdens of beef, potatoes, and batter pudding — the lucky little feet these, with Sunday boots on them, when father is in good work and has brought home all his money; not the poor little feet in worn shoes, carrying little bodies in the thread-bare clothes of all the week, when father is out of work, or ill, or drunk, and the Sunday cooking may very easily be done at home—if any there be to do.

On Sunday morning one or two heads of families appear in wonderful black suits, with unnumbered creases and wrinklings at the seams. At their sides and about their heels trot the unresting little feet, and from under painful little velvet caps and straw hats stare solemn little faces towelled to a polish. Thus disposed and arrayed, they fare gravely through the grim

little streets to a grim Little Bethel where are gathered together others in like garb and attendance; and for two hours they endure the frantic menace of hell-fire.

Most of the men, however, lie in shirt and trousers on their beds and read the Sunday paper; while some are driven forth —for they hinder the housework—to loaf, and await the opening of the beer-shop round the corner. Thus goes Sunday in this street, and every Sunday is the same as every other Sunday, so that one monotony is broken with another. For the women, however, Sunday is much as other days, except that there is rather more work for them. The break in their round of the week is washing day.

No event in the outer world makes any impression in this street. Nations may rise, or may totter in ruin; but here the

colourless day will work through its twenty-four hours just as it did yesterday, and just as it will to-morrow. Without there may be party strife, wars and rumours of wars, public rejoicings; but the trotting of the little feet will be neither quickened nor stayed. Those quaint little women, the girl-children of this street, who use a motherly management toward all girl-things younger than themselves, and toward all boys as old or older, with 'Bless the child!' or 'Drat the children!' — those quaint little women will still go marketing with big baskets, and will regard the price of bacon as chief among human considerations. Nothing disturbs this street—nothing but a strike.

Nobody laughs here—life is too serious a thing; nobody sings. There was once a woman who sang — a young wife from the country. But she bore children, and

her voice cracked. Then her man died, and she sang no more. They took away her home, and with her children about her skirts she left this street for ever. The other women did not think much of her. She was 'helpless.

One of the square holes in this street—one of the single, ground-floor holes—is found, on individual examination, to differ from the others. There has been an attempt to make it into a shop-window. Half a dozen candles, a few sickly sugarsticks, certain shrivelled bloaters, some bootlaces, and a bundle or two of firewood compose a stock which at night is sometimes lighted by a little paraffin lamp in a tin sconce, and sometimes by a candle. A widow lives here—a gaunt, bony widow, with sunken, red eyes. She has other sources of income than the candles and the bootlaces: she

washes and chars all day, and she sews cheap shirts at night. Two 'young men lodgers,' moreover, sleep upstairs, and the children sleep in the back room; she herself is supposed not to sleep at all. The policeman does not knock here in the morning—the widow wakes the lodgers herself; and nobody in the street behind ever looks out of window before going to bed, no matter how late, without seeing a light in the widow's room where she plies her needle. She is a quiet woman, who speaks little with her neighbours, having other things to do: a woman of pronounced character, to whom it would be unadvisable—even dangerous—to offer coals or blankets. Hers was the strongest contempt for the helpless woman who sang: a contempt whose added bitterness might be traced to its source. For when the sing-

ing woman was marketing, from which door of the pawnshop had she twice met the widow coming forth?

This is not a dirty street, taken as a whole. The widow's house is one of the cleanest, and the widow's children match the house. The one house cleaner than the widow's is ruled by a despotic Scotch-woman, who drives every hawker off her whitened step, and rubs her door handle if a hand have rested on it. The Scotch-woman has made several attempts to accommodate 'young men lodgers,' but they have ended in shrill rows.

There is no house without children in this street, and the number of them grows ever and ever greater. Nine-tenths of the doctor's visits are on this account alone, and his appearances are the chief matter of such conversation as the women

make across the fences. One after another the little strangers come, to live through lives as flat and colourless as the day's life in this street. Existence dawns, and the doctor-watchman's door knock resounds along the row of rectangular holes. Then a muffled cry announces that a small new being has come to trudge and sweat its way in the appointed groove. Later, the trotting of little feet and the school; the mid-day play hour, when love peeps even into this street; after that more trotting of little feet—strange little feet, new little feet—and the scrubbing, and the squalling, and the barren flower-pot; the end of the sooty day's work; the last home-coming; nightfall; sleep.

When love's light falls into some corner of the street, it falls at an early hour of this mean life, and is itself but a dusty

ray. It falls early, because it is the sole bright thing which the street sees, and is watched for and counted on. Lads and lasses, awkwardly arm-in-arm, go pacing up and down this street, before the natural interest in marbles and doll's houses would have left them in a brighter place. They are 'keeping company'; the manner of which proceeding is indigenous — is a custom native to the place. The young people first 'walk out' in pairs. There is no exchange of promises, no troth-plight, no engagement, no love-talk. They patrol the streets side by side, usually in silence, sometimes with fatuous chatter. There are no dances, no tennis, no water-parties, no picnics to bring them together: so they must walk out, or be unacquainted. If two of them grow dissatisfied with each other's company, nothing

is easier than to separate and walk out with somebody else. When by these means each has found a fit mate (or thinks so), a ring is bought, and the odd association becomes a regular engagement; but this is not until the walking out has endured for many months. The two stages of courtship are spoken of indiscriminately as 'keeping company,' but a very careful distinction is drawn between them by the parties concerned. Nevertheless, in the walking out period it would be almost as great a breach of faith for either to walk out with more than one, as it would be if the full engagement had been made. And love-making in this street is a dreary thing, when one thinks of love-making in other places. It begins—and it ends—too soon.

Nobody from this street goes to the theatre. That would mean a lon

journey, and it would cost money which might buy bread and beer and boots. For those, too, who wear black Sunday suits it would be sinful. Nobody reads poetry or romance. The very words are foreign. A Sunday paper in some few houses provides such reading as this street is disposed to achieve. Now and again a penny novel has been found among the private treasures of a growing daughter, and has been wrathfully confiscated. For the air of this street is unfavourable to the ideal.

Yet there are aspirations. There has lately come into the street a young man lodger who belongs to a Mutual Improvement Society. Membership in this society is regarded as a sort of learned degree, and at its meetings debates are held and papers smugly read by lamentably self-

satisfied young men lodgers, whose only preparation for debating and writing is a fathomless ignorance. For ignorance is the inevitable portion of dwellers here: seeing nothing, reading nothing, and considering nothing.

Where in the East End lies this street? Everywhere. The hundred-and-fifty yards is only a link in a long and a mightily tangled chain—is only a turn in a tortuous maze. This street of the square holes is hundreds of miles long. That it is planned in short lengths is true, but there is no other way in the world that can more properly be called a single street, because of its dismal lack of accent, its sordid uniformity, its utter remoteness from delight.

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LIZERUNT

LIZERUNT

I

LIZER'S WOOING

SOMEWHERE in the register was written the name Elizabeth Hunt; but seventeen years after the entry the spoken name was Lizerunt. Lizerunt worked at a pickle factory, and appeared abroad in an elaborate and shabby costume, usually supplemented by a white apron. Withal she was something of a beauty. That is to say, her cheeks were very red, her teeth were very large and white, her nose was small and snub, and her fringe was long and shiny; while her face, new-washed, was susceptible of a

high polish. Many such girls are married at sixteen, but Lizerunt was belated, and had never a bloke at all.

Billy Chope was a year older than Lizerunt. He wore a billycock with a thin brim and a permanent dent in the crown; he had a bob-tail coat, with the collar turned up at one side and down at the other, as an expression of independence; between his meals he carried his hands in his breeches pockets; and he lived with his mother, who mangled. His conversation with Lizerunt consisted long of perfunctory nods; but great things happened this especial Thursday evening, as Lizerunt, making for home, followed the fading red beyond the furthermost end of Commercial Road. For Billy Chope, slouching in the opposite direction, lurched across the pavement as they met, and taking the nearer hand from his pocket, caught and twisted her arm, bumping her against the wall.

'Garn,' said Lizerunt, greatly pleased: 'le' go!' For she knew that this was love.

'Where yer auf to, Lizer?'

''Ome, o' course, cheeky. Le' go;' and she snatched—in vain—at Billy's hat.

Billy let go, and capered in front of her. She feigned to dodge by him, careful not to be too quick, because affairs were developing.

'I say, Lizer,' said Billy, stopping his dance and becoming business-like, 'goin' anywhere Monday?'

'Not along o' you, cheeky; you go 'long o' Beller Dawson, like wot you did Easter.'

'Blow Beller Dawson; *she* ain't no good. I'm goin' on the Flats. Come?'

Lizerunt, delighted but derisive, ended with a promise to 'see.' The bloke had come at last, and she walked home with the feeling of having taken her degree. She had half assured herself of it two days before, when Sam Cardew threw an orange peel at her, but went away after a little prancing on the pavement. Sam was a smarter fellow than Billy, and earned his own living; probably his attentions were serious; but one

must prefer the bird in hand. As for Billy Chope, he went his way, resolved himself to take home what mangling he should find his mother had finished, and stick to the money; also, to get all he could from her by blandishing and bullying: that the jaunt to Wanstead Flats might be adequately done.

There is no other fair like Whit Monday's on Wanstead Flats. Here is a square mile and more of open land where you may howl at large; here is no danger of losing yourself as in Epping Forest; the public-houses are always with you; shows, shies, swings, merry-go-rounds, fried fish stalls, donkeys are packed closer than on Hampstead Heath; the ladies' tormentors are larger, and their contents smell worse than at any other fair. Also, you may be drunk and disorderly without being locked up,—for the stations won't hold everybody,—and when all else has palled, you may set fire to the turf. Hereinto Billy and Lizerunt projected them-

selves from the doors of the Holly Tree on Whit Monday morning. But through hours on hours of fried fish and half-pints both were conscious of a deficiency. For the hat of Lizerunt was brown and old; plush it was not, and its feather was a mere foot long and of a very rusty black. Now, it is not decent for a factory girl from Limehouse to go bank-holidaying under any but a hat of plush, very high in the crown, of a wild blue or a wilder green, and carrying withal an ostrich feather, pink or scarlet or what not; a feather that springs from the fore-part, climbs the crown, and drops as far down the shoulders as may be. Lizerunt knew this, and, had she had no bloke, would have stayed at home. But a chance is a chance. As it was, only another such hapless girl could measure her bitter envy of the feathers about her, or would so joyfully have given an ear for the proper splendour. Billy, too, had a vague impression, muddled by but not drowned in half-pints, that some degree of plush was condign to the occasion and to his

own expenditure. Still, there was no quarrel; and the pair walked and ran with arms about each other's necks; and Lizerunt thumped her bloke on the back at proper intervals; so that the affair went regularly on the whole: although, in view of Lizerunt's shortcomings, Billy did not insist on the customary exchange of hats.

Everything, I say, went well and well enough until Billy bought a ladies' tormentor and began to squirt it at Lizerunt. For then Lizerunt went scampering madly, with piercing shrieks, until her bloke was left some little way behind, and Sam Cardew, turning up at that moment and seeing her running alone in the crowd, threw his arms about her waist and swung her round him again and again, as he floundered gallantly this way and that, among the shies and the hokey-pokey barrows.

'Ullo, Lizer! Where *are* y' a-comin' to? If I 'adn't laid 'old o' ye—!' But here Billy Chope arrived to demand what the 'ell Sam Cardew was doing with his gal. Now Sam was ever

readier for a fight than Billy was; but the sum of Billy's half-pints was large: wherefore the fight began. On the skirt of an hilarious ring Lizerunt, after some small outcry, triumphed aloud. Four days before, she had no bloke; and here she stood with two, and those two fighting for her! Here in the public gaze, on the Flats! For almost five minutes she was Helen of Troy.

And in much less time Billy tasted repentance. The haze of half-pints was dispelled, and some teeth went with it. Presently, whimpering and with a bloody muzzle, he rose and made a running kick at the other. Then, being thwarted in a bolt, he flung himself down; and it was like to go hard with him at the hands of the crowd. Punch you may on Wanstead Flats, but execration and worse is your portion if you kick anybody except your wife. But, as the ring closed, the helmets of two policemen were seen to be working in over the surrounding heads; and Sam Cardew, quickly assuming his coat, turned away with such

an air of blamelessness as is practicable with a damaged eye; while Billy went off unheeded in an opposite direction.

Lizerunt and her new bloke went the routine of half-pints and merry-go-rounds, and were soon on right thumping terms; and Lizerunt was as well satisfied with the issue as she was proud of the adventure. Billy was all very well; but Sam was better. She resolved to draw him for a feathered hat before next bank holiday. So the sun went down on her and her bloke hanging on each other's necks and straggling toward the Romford Road with shouts and choruses. The rest was tram-car, Bow Music Hall, half-pints, and darkness.

Billy took home his wounds, and his mother, having moved his wrath by asking their origin, sought refuge with a neighbour. He accomplished his revenge in two instalments. Two nights later Lizerunt was going with a jug of beer; when somebody sprang from a dark corner,

landed her under the ear, knocked her sprawling; and made off to the sound of her lamentations. She did not see who it was, but she knew; and next day Sam Cardew was swearing he'd break Billy's back. He did not, however, for that same evening a gang of seven or eight fell on him with sticks and belts. (They were Causeway chaps, while Sam was a Brady's Laner, which would have been reason enough by itself, even if Billy Chope had not been one of them). Sam did his best for a burst through and a run, but they pulled and battered him down; and they kicked him about the head, and they kicked him about the belly; and they took to their heels when he was speechless and still.

He lay at home for near four weeks, and when he stood up again it was in many bandages. Lizerunt came often to his bedside, and twice she brought an orange. On these occasions there was much talk of vengeance. But the weeks went on. It was a month since Sam had left his bed; and Lizerunt was getting a little

tired of bandages. Also, she had begun to doubt and to consider bank holiday — scarce a fortnight off. For Sam was stone broke, and a plush hat was further away than ever. And all through the later of these weeks Billy Chope was harder than ever on his mother, and she, well knowing that if he helped her by taking home he would pocket the money at the other end, had taken to finishing and delivering in his absence, and, threats failing to get at the money, Billy Chope was impelled to punch her head and gripe her by the throat.

There was a milliner's window, with a show of nothing but fashionable plush-and-feather hats, and Lizerunt was lingering hereabouts one evening; when someone took her by the waist, and someone said, 'Which d'yer like, Lizer?—The yuller un?'

Lizerunt turned and saw that it was Billy. She pulled herself away, and backed off, sullen and distrustful. 'Garn,' she said.

'Straight,' said Billy, 'I'll sport yer one. . . . No kid, I will.'

'Garn,' said Lizerunt once more. 'Wot yer gittin' at now?'

But presently, being convinced that bashing wasn't in it, she approached less guardedly; and she went away with a paper bag and the reddest of all the plushes and the bluest of all the feathers; a hat that challenged all the Flats the next bank holiday, a hat for which no girl need have hesitated to sell her soul. As for Billy, why, he was as good as another; and you can't have everything; and Sam Cardew, with his bandages and his grunts and groans, was no great catch after all.

This was the wooing of Lizerunt: for in a few months she and Billy married under the blessing of a benignant rector, who periodically set aside a day for free weddings, and, on principle, encouraged early matrimony. And they lived with Billy's mother.

II

LIZER'S FIRST

WHEN Billy Chope married Lizerunt there was a small rejoicing. There was no wedding-party; because it was considered that what there might be to drink would be better in the family. Lizerunt's father was not, and her mother felt no interest in the affair; not having seen her daughter for a year, and happening, at the time, to have a month's engagement in respect of a drunk and disorderly. So that there were but three of them; and Billy Chope got exceedingly tipsy early in the day; and in the evening his bride bawled a continual chorus, while his mother, influenced by that unwonted quartern of gin the occasion sanctioned, wept dismally over her boy, who was much too far gone to resent it.

His was the chief reason for rejoicing. For Lizerunt had always been able to extract ten shillings a week from the pickle factory, and it was to be presumed that as Lizer Chope her earning capacity would not diminish; and the wages would make a very respectable addition to the precarious revenue, depending on the mangle, that Billy extorted from his mother. As for Lizer, she was married. That was the considerable thing; for she was but a few months short of eighteen, and that, as you know, is a little late.

Of course there were quarrels very soon; for the new Mrs Chope, less submissive at first than her mother-in-law, took a little breaking in, and a liberal renewal of the manual treatment once applied in her courting days. But the quarrels between the women were comforting to Billy: a diversion and a source of better service.

As soon as might be Lizer took the way of womankind. This circumstance brought an un-

expected half-crown from the evangelical rector who had married the couple gratis; for recognising Billy in the street by accident, and being told of Mrs Chope's prospects, as well as that Billy was out of work (a fact undeniable), he reflected that his principles did on occasion lead to discomfort of a material sort. And Billy, to whose comprehension the half-crown opened a new field of receipt, would doubtless have long remained a client of the rector, had not that zealot hastened to discover a vacancy for a warehouse porter, the offer of presentation whereunto alienated Billy Chope for ever. But there were meetings and demonstrations of the Unemployed; and it was said that shillings had been given away; and, as being at a meeting in a street was at least as amusing as being in a street where there was no meeting, Billy often went, on the off chance. But his lot was chiefly disappointment: wherefore he became more especially careful to furnish himself ere he left home.

For certain weeks cash came less freely than ever

from the two women. Lizer spoke of providing for the necessities of the expected child : a manifestly absurd procedure, as Billy pointed out, since, if they were unable to clothe or feed it, the duty would fall on its grandmother. That was law, and nobody could get over it. But even with this argument, a shilling cost him many more demands and threats than it had used, and a deal more general trouble.

At last Lizer ceased from going to the pickle factory, and could not even help Billy's mother at the mangle for long. This lasted for near a week, when Billy, rising at ten with a bad mouth, resolved to stand no nonsense, and demanded two shillings.

'Two bob? Wot for?' Lizer asked.

''Cos I want it. None o' yer lip.'

'Ain't got it,' said Lizer sulkily.

'That's a bleed'n' lie.'

'Lie yerself.'

'I'll break y'in 'arves, ye blasted 'eifer!' He ran at her throat and forced her back over a

chair. 'I'll pull yer face auf! If y' don't give me the money, gawblimy, I'll do for ye!'

Lizer strained and squalled. 'Le' go! You'll kill me an' the kid too!' she grunted hoarsely. Billy's mother ran in and threw her arms about him, dragging him away. 'Don't Billy,' she said, in terror. 'Don't Billy—not now! You'll get in trouble. Come away! She might go auf, an' you'd get in trouble!'

Billy Chope flung his wife over and turned to his mother. 'Take yer 'ands auf me,' he said: 'go on, or I'll gi' ye somethin' for yerself' And he punched her in the breast by way of illustration.

'You shall 'ave what I've got, Billy, if it's money,' the mother said. 'But don't go an' git yerself in trouble, don't. Will a shillin' do?'

'No, it won't. Think I'm a bloomin' kid? I mean 'avin' two bob this mornin'.'

'I was a-keepin' it for the rent, Billy, but—'

'Yus; think o' the bleed'n' lan'lord 'fore me doncher?' And he pocketed the two shillings.

'I ain't settled with you yut, my gal,' he added to Lizer; 'mikin' about at 'ome an' 'idin' money. You wait a bit.'

Lizer had climbed into an erect position, and, gravid and slow, had got as far as the passage. Mistaking this for a safe distance, she replied with defiant railings. Billy made for her with a kick that laid her on the lower stairs, and, swinging his legs round his mother as she obstructed him, entreating him not to get in trouble, he attempted to kick again in a more telling spot. But a movement among the family upstairs and a tap at the door hinted of interference, and he took himself off.

Lizer lay doubled up on the stairs, howling: but her only articulate cry was,—'Gawd 'elp me, it's comin'!'

Billy went to the meeting of the Unemployed, and cheered a proposal to storm the Tower of London. But he did not join the procession following a man with a handkerchief on a stick, who promised destruction to every policeman in

his path: for he knew the fate of such processions. With a few others he hung about the nearest tavern for a while, on the chance of the advent of a flush sailor from St Katharine's, disposed to treat out-o'-workers. Then he went alone to a quieter beer-house and took a pint or two at his own expense. A glance down the music-hall bills hanging in the bar having given him a notion for the evening, he bethought himself of dinner, and made for home.

The front door was open, and in the first room, where the mangle stood, there were no signs of dinner. And this was at three o'cock! Billy pushed into the room behind, demanding why.

'Billy,' Lizer said faintly from her bed, 'look at the baby!'

Something was moving feebly under a flannel petticoat. Billy pulled the petticoat aside, and said,—'That? Well, it *is* a measly snipe.' It was a blind, hairless homunculus, short of a foot long, with a skinny face set in a great skull. There was a black bruise on one side from hip

to armpit. Billy dropped the petticoat and said, 'Where's my dinner?'

'I dunno,' Lizer responded hazily. 'Wot's the time?'

'Time? Don't try to kid me. You git up; go on. I want my dinner.'

'Mother's gittin' it, I think,' said Lizer. 'Doctor had to slap 'im like anythink 'fore 'e'd cry. 'E don't cry now much. 'E—'

'Go on; out ye git. I do'want no more damn jaw. Git my dinner.'

'I'm a-gittin' of it, Billy,' his mother said, at the door. She had begun when he first entered. 'It won't be a minute.'

'You come 'ere; y'aint alwis s' ready to do er' work, are ye? She ain't no call to stop there no longer, an' I owe 'er one for this mornin'. Will ye git out, or shall I kick ye?'

'She can't, Billy,' his mother said. And Lizer snivelled and said, 'You're a damn brute. Y'ought to be bleedin' well booted.'

But Billy had her by the shoulders and began

to haul; and again his mother besought him to remember what he might bring upon himself. At this moment the doctor's dispenser, a fourth-year London Hospital student of many inches, who had been washing his hands in the kitchen, came in. For a moment he failed to comprehend the scene. Then he took Billy Chope by the collar, hauled him pell-mell along the passage, kicked him (hard) into the gutter, and shut the door.

When he returned to the room, Lizer, sitting up and holding on by the bed-frame, gasped hysterically: 'Ye bleedin' makeshift, I'd 'ave yer liver out if I could reach ye! You touch my 'usband, ye long pisenin' 'ound you! Ow!' And, infirm of aim, she flung a cracked teacup at his head. Billy's mother said, 'Y'ought to be ashamed of yourself, you low blaggard. If 'is father was alive 'e'd knock yer 'ead auf. Call yourself a doctor—a passel o' boys—! Git out! Go out o' my 'ouse or I'll give y'in charge!'

'But—why, hang it, he'd have killed her.' Then to Lizer—'Lie down.'

'Sha'n't lay down. Keep auf! if you come near me I'll corpse ye. You go while ye're safe!'

The dispenser appealed to Billy's mother. 'For God's sake make her lie down. She'll kill herself. I'll go. Perhaps the doctor had better come.' And he went: leaving the coast clear for Billy Chope to return and avenge his kicking.

III

A CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

LIZER was some months short of twenty-one when her third child was born. The pickle factory had discarded her some time before, and since that her trade had consisted in odd jobs of charing. Odd jobs of charing have a shade the better of a pickle factory in the matter of respectability, but they are precarious, and they are worse paid at that. In the East End they are sporadic and few. Moreover, it is in the household where paid help is a rarity that the bitterness of servitude is felt. Also, the uncertainty and irregularity of the returns were a trouble to Billy Chope. He was never sure of having got them all. It might be ninepence, or a shilling, or eighteenpence. Once or twice, to his knowledge,

it had been half-a-crown, from a chance job at a doctor's or a parson's, and once it was three shillings. That it might be half-a-crown or three shillings again, and that some of it was being kept back, was ever the suspicion evoked by Lizer's evening homing. Plainly, with these fluctuating and uncertain revenues, more bashing than ever was needed to ensure the extraction of the last copper; empty-handedness called for bashing on its own account; so that it was often Lizer's hap to be refused a job because of a black eye.

Lizer's self was scarcely what it had been. The red of her cheeks, once bounded only by the eyes and the mouth, had shrunk to a spot in the depth of each hollow; gaps had been driven in her big white teeth; even the snub nose had run to a point, and the fringe hung dry and ragged, while the bodily outline was as a sack's. At home, the children lay in her arms or tumbled at her heels, puling and foul. Whenever she was near it, there was the mangle to be turned; for lately Billy's mother had exhibited a strange

weakness, sometimes collapsing with a gasp in the act of brisk or prolonged exertion, and often leaning on whatever stood hard by and grasping at her side. This ailment she treated, when she had twopence, in such terms as made her smell of gin and peppermint; and more than once this circumstance had inflamed the breast of Billy her son, who was morally angered by this boozing away of money that was really his.

Lizer's youngest, being seven or eight months old, was mostly taking care of itself, when Billy made a welcome discovery after a hard and pinching day. The night was full of blinding wet, and the rain beat on the window as on a drum. Billy sat over a small fire in the front room smoking his pipe, while his mother folded clothes for delivery. He stamped twice on the hearth, and then, drawing off his boot, he felt inside it. It was a nail. The poker-head made a good anvil, and, looking about for a hammer, Billy bethought him of a brick from the mangle. He rose, and, lifting the lid of the weight-box, groped

about among the clinkers and the other ballast till he came upon a small but rather heavy paper parcel. 'Ere—wot's this?' he said, and pulled it out.

His mother, whose back had been turned, hastened across the room, hand to breast (it had got to be her habit). 'What is it, Billy?' she said. 'Not that: there's nothing there. I'll get anything you want, Billy.' And she made a nervous catch at the screw of paper. But Billy fended her off, and tore the package open. It was money, arranged in little columns of farthings, halfpence, and threepenny pieces, with a few sixpences, a shilling or two, and a single half-sovereign. 'O,' said Billy, 'this is the game, is it?—'idin' money in the mangle! Got any more?' And he hastily turned the brickbats.

'No, Billy, don't take that—don't!' implored his mother. 'There'll be some money for them things when they go 'ome—'ave that. I'm savin' it, Billy, for something partic'ler: s'elp me Gawd, I am, Billy.'

'Yus,' replied Billy, raking diligently among the clinkers, 'savin' it for a good ol' booze. An' now you won't 'ave one. Bleedin' nice thing, 'idin' money away from yer own son!'

'It ain't for that, Billy—s'elp me, it ain't; it's case anythink 'appens to me. On'y to put me away decent, Billy, that's all. We never know, an' you'll be glad of it t'elp bury me if I should go any time—'

'I'll be glad of it now,' answered Billy, who had it in his pocket; an' I've got it. You ain't a dyin' sort, *you* ain't; an' if you was, the parish 'ud soon tuck *you* up. P'raps you'll be straighter about money after this.'

'Let me 'ave *some*, then—you can't want it all. Give me some, an' then 'ave the money for the things. There's ten dozen and seven, and you can take 'em yerself if ye like.'

'Wot—in this 'ere rain? Not me! I bet I'd 'ave the money if I wanted it without that. 'Ere—change these 'ere fardens at the draper's wen you go out: there's two bob's worth an' a

penn'orth; I don't want to bust my pockets wi' them.'

While they spoke Lizer had come in from the back room. But she said nothing: she rather busied herself with a child she had in her arms. When Billy's mother, despondent and tearful, had tramped out into the rain with a pile of clothes in an oilcloth wrapper, she said sulkily, without looking up, 'You might 'a' let 'er kep' that; you git all you want.'

At another time this remonstrance would have provoked active hostilities; but now, with the money about him, Billy was complacently disposed. 'You shutcher 'ead,' he said, 'I got this, any'ow. She can make it up out o' my rent if she likes.' This last remark was a joke, and he chuckled as he made it. For Billy's rent was a simple fiction, devised, on the suggestion of a smart canvasser, to give him a parliamentary vote.

That night Billy and Lizer slept, as usual, in the bed in the back room, where the two younger children also were. Billy's mother made a bed-

stead nightly with three chairs and an old trunk in the front room by the mangle, and the eldest child lay in a floor-bed near her. Early in the morning Lizer awoke at a sudden outcry of the little creature. He clawed at the handle till he opened the door, and came staggering and tumbling into the room with screams of terror. 'Wring 'is blasted neck,' his father grunted sleepily. 'Wot's the kid 'owlin' for?'

'I's 'f'aid o' g'anny—I's 'f'aid o' g'anny!' was all the child could say; and when he had said it, he fell to screaming once more.

Lizer rose and went to the next room; and straightway came a scream from her also. 'O—O—Billy! Billy! O my Gawd! Billy come 'ere!'

And Billy, fully startled, followed in Lizer's wake. He blundered in, rubbing his eyes, and saw.

Stark on her back in the huddled bed of old wrappers and shawls lay his mother. The outline of her poor face—strained in an upward stare of painful surprise—stood sharp and meagre

against the black of the grate beyond. But the muddy old skin was white, and looked cleaner than its wont, and many of the wrinkles were gone.

Billy Chope, half-way across the floor, recoiled from the corpse, and glared at it pallidly from the doorway.

'Good Gawd!' he croaked faintly, 'is she dead?'

Seized by a fit of shuddering breaths, Lizer sank on the floor, and, with her head across the body, presently broke into a storm of hysterical blubbering, while Billy, white and dazed, dressed hurriedly and got out of the house.

He was at home as little as might be until the coroner's officer carried away the body two days later. When he came for his meals, he sat doubtful and querulous in the matter of the front room door's being shut. The dead once clear away, however, he resumed his faculties and clearly saw that here was a bad change for the worse. There was the mangle, but who was to work it? If Lizer did, there would be no

more charing jobs—a clear loss of one-third of his income. And it was not at all certain that the people who had given their mangling to his mother would give it to Lizer. Indeed, it was pretty sure that many would not, because mangling is a thing given by preference to widows, and many widows of the neighbourhood were perpetually competing for it. Widows, moreover, had the first call in most odd jobs whereunto Lizer might turn her hand: an injustice whereon Billy meditated with bitterness.

The inquest was formal and unremarked, the medical officer having no difficulty in certifying a natural death from heart disease. The bright idea of a collection among the jury, which Billy communicated, with pitiful representations, to the coroner's officer, was brutally swept aside by that functionary, made cunning by much experience. So the inquest brought him naught save disappointment and a sense of injury. . . .

The mangling orders fell away as suddenly

and completely as he had feared: they were duly absorbed among the local widows. Neglect the children as Lizer might, she could no longer leave them as she had done. Things, then, were bad with Billy, and neither threats nor thumps could evoke a shilling now.

It was more than Billy could bear: so that, 'Ere,' he said one night, 'I've 'ad enough o' this. You go and get some money; go on.'

'Go an' git it?' replied Lizer. 'O yus. That's easy, ain't it? "Go an' git it," says you. 'Ow?'

'Any'ow—I don' care. Go on.'

'Wy,' replied Lizer, looking up with wide eyes, 'd'ye think I can go an' pick it up in the street?'

'Course you can. Plenty others does, don't they?'

'Gawd, Billy . . . wot d'ye mean?'

'Wot I say; plenty others does it. Go on—you ain't so bleed'n' innocent as all that. Go an' see Sam Cardew. Go on—'ook it.'

Lizer, who had been kneeling at the child's

floor-bed, rose to her feet, pale faced and bright of eye.

'Stow kiddin', Billy,' she said. 'You don't mean that. I'll go round to the fact'ry in the mornin': p'raps they'll take me on temp'ry.'

'Damn the fact'ry.'

He pushed her into the passage. 'Go on—you git me some money, if ye don't want yer bleed'n' 'ead knocked auf.'

There was a scuffle in the dark passage, with certain blows, a few broken words, and a sob. Then the door slammed, and Lizer Chope was in the windy street.

WITHOUT VISIBLE MEANS

WITHOUT VISIBLE MEANS

ALL East London idled, or walked in a procession, or waylaid and bashed, or cried in an empty kitchen: for it was the autumn of the Great Strikes. One army of men, having been prepared, was ordered to strike—and struck. Other smaller armies of men, with no preparation, were ordered to strike to express sympathy—and struck. Other armies still were ordered to strike because it was the fashion—and struck. Then many hands were discharged because the strikes in other trades left them no work. Many others came from other parts in regiments to work, but remained to loaf in gangs: taught by the example of earlier regiments, which, the situation being explained (an expression devised to include mobbings and

kickings and flingings into docks), had returned whence they came. So that East London was very noisy and largely hungry; and the rest of the world looked on with intense interest, making earnest suggestions, and comprehending nothing. Lots of strikers, having no strike pay and finding little nourishment in processions, started off to walk to Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool or Newcastle, where work might be got. Along the Great North Road such men might be seen in silent companies of a dozen or twenty, now and again singly or in couples. At the tail of one such gang, which gathered in the Burdett Road and found its way into the Enfield Road by way of Victoria Park, Clapton, and Stamford Hill, walked a little group of three: a voluble young man of thirty, a stolid workman rather older, and a pale, anxious little fellow, with a nasty spasmic cough and a canvas bag of tools.

The little crowd straggled over the footpath and the road, few of its members speaking, most of them keeping to their places and themselves.

As yet there was nothing of the tramp in the aspect of these mechanics. With their washed faces and well-mended clothes they might have been taken for a jury coming from a local inquest. As the streets got broken and detached, with patches of field between, they began to look about them. One young fellow in front (with no family to think of), who looked upon the enterprise as an amusing sort of tour, and had even brought an accordion, began to rebel against the general depression, and attempted a joke about going to the Alexandra Palace. But in the rear, the little man with the canvas bag, putting his hand abstractedly into his pocket, suddenly stared and stopped. He drew out the hand, and saw in it three shillings.

'S'elp me,' he said, 'the missis is done that—shoved it in unbeknown when I come away! An' she's on'y got a bob for 'erself an' the kids.' He broke into a sweat of uneasiness. 'I'll 'ave to send it back at the next post-office, that's all.'

'Send it back? not you!' Thus with deep scorn the voluble young man at his side. '*She'll* be all right, you lay your life. A woman allus knows 'ow to look after 'erself. You'll bleed'n' soon want it, an' bad. You do as I tell you, Joey: stick to it. That's right, Dave, ain't it?'

'Matter o' fancy,' replied the stolid man. 'My missis cleared my pockets out 'fore I got away. Shouldn't wonder at bein' sent after for leavin' 'er chargeable if I don't soon send some more. Women's different.'

The march continued, and grew dustier. The cheerful pilgrim in front produced his accordion. At Palmer's Green four went straight ahead to try for work at the Enfield Arms Factory. The others, knowing the thing hopeless, turned off to the left for Potter's Bar.

After a long silence, 'Which'll be nearest, Dave,' asked little Joey Clayton, 'Newcastle or Middlesborough?'

'Middlesborough,' said Dave; 'I done it afore.'

'Trampin' ain't so rough on a man, is it, after all?' asked Joey wistfully. *You* done all right, didn't you?'

'Got through. All depends, though it's rough enough. Matter o' luck. *I* 'ad the bad weather.'

'If I don't get a good easy job where we're goin',' remarked the voluble young man, 'I'll 'ave a strike there too.'

''Ave a strike there?' exclaimed Joey. ''Ow? Who'd call 'em out?'

'Wy, *I* would. I think I'm equal to doin' it, ain't I? An' when workin' men stand idle an' 'ungry in the midst o' the wealth an' the lukshry an' the igstravagance they've produced with the sweat of their brow, why, then, feller-workmen, it's time to act. It's time to bring the nigger-drivin' bloated capitalists to their knees.'

''Ear, 'ear,' applauded Joey Clayton; tamely, perhaps, for the words were not new. 'Good on yer, Newman!' Newman had a habit of practising this sort of thing in snatches whenever he saw the chance. He had learnt the trick

in a debating society; and Joey Clayton was always an applausive audience. There was a pause, the accordion started another tune, and Newman tried a different passage of his harangue.

'In the shop they call me Skulky Newman. Why? 'Cos I skulk, o' course' ('Ear, 'ear,' dreamily — from Dave this time). 'I ain't ashamed of it, my friends. I'm a miker out an' out, an' I 'ope I shall always remain a miker. The less a worker does the more 'as to be imployed, don't they? An' the more the toilers wrings out o' the capitalists, don't they? Very well then, I mike, an' I do it as a sacred dooty.'

'You'll 'ave all the mikin' you want for a week or two,' said Dave Burge placidly. 'Stow it.'

At Potter's Bar the party halted and sat under a hedge to eat hunks of bread and cheese (or hunks of bread and nothing else) and to drink cold tea out of cans. Skulky Newman, who had brought nothing, stood in with his two friends.

As they started anew and turned into the Great North Road he said, stretching himself and looking slyly at Joey Clayton, 'If *I'd* got a bob or two I'd stand you two blokes a pint apiece.'

Joey looked troubled. 'Well, as you ain't, I suppose I ought to,' he said uneasily, turning toward the little inn hard by. 'Dave,' he cried to Burge, who was walking on, 'won't you 'ave a drink?' And, 'Well, if you *are* goin' to do the toff, I ain't proud,' was the slow reply.

Afterward, Joey was inclined to stop at the post-office to send away at least two shillings. But Newman wouldn't. He enlarged on the improvidence of putting out of reach that which might be required on an emergency, he repeated his axiom as to a woman's knack of keeping alive in spite of all things: and Joey determined not to send—for a day or so at any rate.

The road got looser and dustier; the symptoms of the tramp came out stronger and stronger on the gang. The accordion struck up from time to time, but ceased toward the end of the after-

noon. The player wearied, and some of the older men, soon tired of walking, were worried by the noise. Joey Clayton, whose cough was aggravated by the dust, was especially tortured, after every fit, to hear the thing drawling and whooping the tune it had drawled and whooped a dozen times before; but he said nothing, scarce knowing what annoyed him.

At Hatfield Station two of the foremost picked up a few coppers by helping with a heavy trap-load of luggage. Up Digswell Hill the party tailed out lengthily, and Newman, who had been letting off a set speech, was fain to save his wind. The night came, clear to see and sweet to smell. Between Welwyn and Codicote the company broke up to roost in such barns as they might possess: all but the master of the accordion, who had stayed at a little public-house at Welwyn, with the notion of earning a pot of beer and a stable-corner (or better) by a tune in the tap-room. Dave Burge lighted on a lone shed of thatched hurdles with loose hay in it

and Newman straightway curled in the snuggest corner on most of the hay. Dave Burge pulled some from under him, and, having helped Joey Clayton to build a nest in the best place left, was soon snoring. But Joey lay awake all night, and sat up and coughed and turned restlessly, being unused to the circumstances and apprehensive of those months in jail, which (it is well known) are rancorously dealt forth among all them that sleep in barns.

Luck provided a breakfast next morning at Codicote: for three bicyclists, going north, stood cold beef and bread round at The Anchor. The man with the accordion caught up. He had made his lodging and breakfast and eightpence: this had determined him to stay at Hitchin, and work it for, at least, a day, and then to diverge into the towns and let the rest go their way. So beyond Hitchin there was no music.

Joey Clayton soon fell slow. Newman had his idea; and the three were left behind, and Joey staggered after his mates with difficulty. He

lacked sleep, and he lacked stamina. Dave Burge took the canvas bag, and there were many rests: when Newman, expressing a resolve to stick by his fellow-man through thick and thin, hinted at drinks. Dave Burge made twopence at Henlow level crossing by holding an unsteady horse while a train passed. Joey saw little of the rest of the day; the road was yellow and dazzling, his cough tore him, and things were red sometimes and sometimes blue. He walked without knowing it, now helped, now lurching on alone. The others of the party were far ahead and forgotten. There was talk of a windmill ahead, where there would be rest; and the three men camped in an old boathouse by the river just outside Biggleswade. Joey, sleeping as he tottered, fell in a heap and lay without moving from sunset to broad morning.

When he woke Dave Burge was sitting at the door, but Newman was gone. Also, there was no sign of the canvas bag.

'No use lookin',' said Dave; ''e's done it.'

'Eh?'

'Skulky's 'opped the twig an' sneaked your tools. Gawd knows where 'e is by now.'

'No—' the little man gasped, sitting up in a pale sweat. . . . 'Not sneaked 'em . . . is 'e? . . . S'elp me, there's a set o' callipers worth fifteen bob in that bag . . . 'e ain't gawn . . .?'

Dave Burge nodded inexorably.

'Best feel in your pockets,' he said, 'p'raps 'e's bin there.'

He had. The little man broke down. 'I was a-goin' to send 'ome that two bob—s'elp me, I was . . . An' what can I do without my tools? If I'd got no job I could 'a pawned 'em—an' then I'd 'a sent 'ome the money—s'elp me I would . . . O, it's crool!'

The walking, with the long sleep after it, had left him sore and stiff, and Dave had work to put him on the road again. He had forgotten yesterday afternoon, and asked, at first, for the

others. They tramped in silence for a few miles: when Joey suddenly flung himself upon a tussock by the wayside.

'Why won't nobody let me live?' he snivelled. '*I'm* a 'armless bloke enough. I worked at Ritterson's, man and boy, very nigh twenty year. When they come an' ordered us out, I come out with the others, peaceful enough; I didn't want to chuck it up, Gawd knows, but I come out promp' when they told me. And when I found another job on the Island, four big blokes set about me an' 'arf killed me. *I* didn't know the place was blocked. And when two o' the blokes was took up, they said I'd get strike-pay again if I didn't identify 'em; so I didn't. But they never give me no strike-pay—they laughed an' chucked me out. An' now I'm a-starvin' on the 'igh road. An' Skulky . . . blimy . . . *'e's* done me too!'

There were days wherein Joey learned to eat a swede pulled from behind a waggon, and to

feel thankful for an early turnip ; might have learned, too, just what tramping means in many ways to a man unskilled both in begging and in theft, but was never equal to it. He coughed—and worse : holding to posts and gates, and often spitting blood. He had little to say, but trudged mechanically, taking note of nothing.

Once, as though aroused from a reverie, he asked, 'Wasn't there some others?'

'Others?' said Dave, for a moment taken aback. 'O, yes, there was some others. They're gone on ahead, y'know.'

Joey tramped for half a mile in silence. Then he said, 'Expect they're 'avin' a rough time too.'

'Ah—very like,' said Dave.

For a space Joey was silent, save for the cough. Then he went on : 'Comes o' not bringing 'cordions with 'em. Everyone ought to take a 'cordion what goes trampin'. I knew a man once that went trampin', an' 'e took a 'cordion. *He* done all right. It ain't so rough for them as

plays on the 'cordion.' And Dave Burge rubbed his cap about his head and stared; but answered nothing.

It was a bad day. Crusts were begged at cottages. Every rise and every turn, the eternal yellow road lay stretch on stretch before them, flouting their unrest. Joey, now unimpressionable, endured more placidly than even Dave Burge. Late in the afternoon, 'No,' he said, 'it ain't so rough for them as plays the 'cordion. They 'as the best of it. . . . S'elp me,' he added suddenly, '*we're* all 'cordions!' He sniggered thoughtfully, and then burst into a cough that left him panting. 'We're nothin' but a bloomin' lot o' 'cordions ourselves,' he went on, having got his breath, 'an' they play any toon they like on us; and that's 'ow they make their livin'. S'elp me, Dave, we're all 'cordions.' And he laughed.

'Um—yus,' the other man grunted. And he looked curiously at his mate; for he had never heard that sort of laugh before.

But Joey fondled the conceit, and returned to

it from time to time; now aloud, now to himself. 'All 'cordions: playin' any toon as is ordered, blimy. . . . *Are* we 'cordions? *I* don't b'lieve we're as much as that . . . no, s'elp me. We're on'y the footlin' little keys; shoved about to soot the toon. . . . Little tin keys, blimy . . . footlin' little keys. . . . I've bin played on plenty, *I* 'ave. . . .'

Dave Burge listened with alarm, and tried to talk of other things. But Joey rarely heard him. 'I've bin played on plenty, *I* 'ave,' he persisted. 'I was played on once by a pal: an' my spring broke.'

At nightfall there was more bad luck. They were driven from a likely barn by a leather-gaitered man with a dog, and for some distance no dormitory could be found. Then it was a cut haystack, with a nest near the top and steps to reach it.

In the night Burge was wakened by a clammy hand upon his face. There was a thick mist.

'It's you, Dave, ain't it?' Clayton was saying.

'Good Gawd, I thought I'd lawst you. What's all this 'ere—not the water is it?—not the dock? I'm soppin' wet.'

Burge himself was wet to the skin. He made Joey lie down, and told him to sleep; but a coughing fit prevented that. 'It was them 'cordions woke me,' he explained when it was over.

So the night put on the shuddering grey of the fore-dawn. And the two tramps left their perch, and betook them, shivering and stamping, to the road.

That morning Joey had short fits of dizziness and faintness. 'It's my spring broke,' he would say after such an attack. 'Bloomin' little tin key put out o' toon.' And once he added, 'I'm up to one toon, though, now: this 'ere bloomin' Dead March.'

Just at the outskirts of a town, where he stopped to cough over a gate, a stout old lady, walking out with a shaggy little dog, gave him a shilling. Dave Burge picked it up as it dropped from his incapable hand, and 'Joey, 'ere's a bob,' he said, 'a lady give it you. You come an' git a drop o' beer.'

They carried a twopenny loaf into the tap-room of a small tavern, and Dave had mild ale himself, but saw that Joey was served with stout with a penn'orth of gin in it. Soon the gin and stout reached Joey's head, and drew it to the table. And he slept, leaving the rest of the shilling where it lay.

Dave arose, and stuffed the last of the twopenny loaf into his pocket. He took a piece of chalk from the bagatelle board in the corner, and wrote this on the table :—'*dr. sir. for god sake take him to the work House.*'

Then he gathered up the coppers where they lay, and stepped quietly into the street.

TO BOW BRIDGE

TO BOW BRIDGE.

THE eleven-five tram-car from Stratford started for Bow a trifle before its time. The conductor knew what he might escape by stealing a march on the closing public-houses; as also what was in store for all the conductors in his wake, till there were no more revellers left to swarm the cars. For it was Saturday night, and many a week's wages were a-knocking down; and the publicans this side of Bow Bridge shut their doors at eleven under Act of Parliament, whereas beyond the Bridge, which is the county of London, the law gives them another hour, and a man may drink many pots therein. And for this, at eleven every Saturday, there is a great rush westward, a vast migration over Lea, from all the length of High Street. From the nearer parts they

walk, or do their best to walk; but from further Stratford, by the Town Hall, the Church, and the Martyrs' Memorial, they crowd the cars. For one thing, it is a long half-mile, and the week's work is over. Also, the car being swamped, it is odds that a man shall save his fare, since no conductor may fight his way a quarter through his passengers before Bow Bridge, where the vehicle is emptied at a rush. And that means yet another half-pint.

So the eleven-five car started sooner than it might have done. As it was spattering with rain, I boarded it, sharing the conductor's forlorn hope, but taking care to sit at the extreme fore-end inside. In the broad street the market clamoured and flared, its lights and shadows flickering and fading about the long churchyard and the steeple in the midst thereof; and toward the distant lights, the shining road sparkled in long reaches, like a blackguard river.

A gap fell here and there among the lights where a publican put his gas out; and at these

points the crowds thickened. A quiet mechanic came in, and sat near a decent woman with children, a bundle, a basket, and a cabbage. Thirty yards on the car rumbled, and suddenly its hinder end was taken in a mass of people—howling, struggling and blaspheming—who stormed and wrangled in at the door and up the stairs. There were lads and men whooping and flushed, there were girls and women screaming choruses; and in a moment the seats were packed, knees were taken, and there was not an inch of standing room. The conductor cried 'All full!' and tugged at his bell-strap, whereunto many were hanging by the hand; but he was swept from his feet, and made to push hard for his own place. And there was no more foothold on the back platform nor the front, nor any vacant step upon the stairway; and the roof was thronged; and the rest of the crowd was fain to waylay the next car.

This one moved off slowly, with shrieks and howls that were racking to the wits. From divers quarters of the roof came a bumping thunder as

of cellar-flapping clogs. Profanity was sluiced down, as it were by pailfuls, from above, and was swilled back as it were in pailfuls from below Blowses in feathered bonnets bawled hilarious obscenity at the jiggers. A little maid with a market-basket, hustled and jostled and elbowed at the far end, listened eagerly and laughed when she could understand; and the quiet mechanic, whose knees had been invaded by an unsteady young woman in a crushed hat, tried to look pleased. My own knees were saved from capture by the near neigbourhood of an enormous female, seated partly on the seat and partly on myself, snorting and gulping with sleep, her head upon the next man's shoulder. (To offer your seat to a standing women would, as beseems a foreign antic, have been visited by the ribaldry of the whole crowd.) In the midst of the riot the decent woman sat silent and indifferent, her children on and about her knees. Further along, two women ate fish with their fingers and discoursed personalities in voices which ran strident through the uproar, as the odour

of their snack asserted itself in the general fetor. And opposite the decent woman there sat a bonnetless drab, who said nothing, but looked at the decent woman's children as a shoeless brat looks at the dolls in a toyshop window.

'So I ses to 'er, I ses'—this from the snacksters —'I'm a respectable married women, I ses. More'n you can say, you barefaced hussey, I ses—' Then a shower of curses, a shout, and a roar of laughter; and the conductor, making slow and laborious progress with the fares nearest him, turned his head. A man had jumped upon the footboard and a passenger's toes. A scuffle and a fight, and both had rolled off into the mire, and got left behind. 'Ain't they fond o' one another?' cried a girl. 'They're a-goin' for a walk together;' and there was a guffaw. 'The silly bleeders 'll be too late for the pubs,' said a male voice; and there was another, for the general understanding was touched.

Then — an effect of sympathy, perhaps — a scuffle broke out on the roof. But this dis-

turbed not the insides. The conductor went on his plaguy task: to save time, he passed over the one or two that, asked now or not, seemed likely to pay at the journey's end. The snacking women resumed their talk, the choristers their singing; the rumble of the wheels was lost in a babel of vacant ribaldry; the enormous woman choked and gasped and snuggled lower down upon her neighbour's shoulder; and the shabby strumpet looked at the children.

A man by the door vomited his liquor: whereat was more hilarity, and his neighbours, with many yaups, shoved further up the middle. But one of the little ones, standing before her mother, was pushed almost to falling; and the harlot, seeing her chance, snatched the child upon her knee. The child looked up, something in wonder, and smiled; and the woman leered as honestly as she might, saying a hoarse word or two.

Presently the conflict overhead, waxing and

waning to an accompaniment of angry shouts, afforded another brief diversion to those within, and something persuaded the standing passengers to shove toward the door. The child had fallen asleep in the street-walker's arms. 'Jinny!' cried the mother, reaching forth and shaking her. 'Jinny! wake up now—you mustn't go to sleep.' And she pulled the little thing from her perch to where she had been standing.

The bonnetless creature bent forward, and, in her curious voice (like that of one sick with shouting), 'She can set on my knee, m'm, if she likes,' she said: 'she's tired.'

The mother busied herself with a jerky adjustment of the child's hat and shawl. 'She mustn't go to sleep,' was all she said; sharply, and without looking up.

The hoarse woman bent further forward, with a propitiatory grin. ''Ow old is she? . . . I'd like to—give 'er a penny.'

The mother answered nothing; but drew the child close by the side of her knee, where a

younger one was sitting, and looked steadily through the fore windows.

The hoarse woman sat back, unquestioning and unresentful, and turned her eyes upon them that were crowding over the conductor; for the car was rising over Bow Bridge. Front and back they surged down from the roof, and the insides made for the door as one man. The big woman's neighbour rose, and let her fall over on the seat, whence, awaking with a loud grunt and an incoherent curse, she rolled after the rest. The conductor, clamant and bedevilled, was caught between the two pell-mells and, demanding fares and gripping his satchel, was carried over the footboard in the rush. The stramash overhead came tangled and swearing down the stairs, gaining volume and force in random punches as it came; and the crowd on the pavement streamed vocally toward a brightness at the bridge foot—the lights of the Bombay Grab.

The woman with the children waited till the

footboard was clear, and then, carrying one child and leading another (her marketings attached about her by indeterminate means), she set the two youngsters on the pavement, leaving the third on the step of the car. The harlot, lingering, lifted the child again—lifted her rather high—and set her on the path with the others. Then she walked away toward the Bombay Grab. A man in a blue serge suit was footing it down the turning between the public-house and the bridge with drunken swiftness and an intermittent stagger; and, tightening her shawl, she went in chase.

The quiet mechanic stood and stretched himself, and took a corner seat near the door; and the tram-car, quiet and vacant, bumped on westward.

THAT BRUTE SIMMONS

THAT BRUTE SIMMONS

SIMMONS'S infamous behaviour toward his wife is still matter for profound wonderment among the neighbours. The other women had all along regarded him as a model husband, and certainly Mrs Simmons was a most conscientious wife. She toiled and slaved for that man, as any woman in the whole street would have maintained, far more than any husband had a right to expect. And now this was what she got for it. Perhaps he had suddenly gone mad.

Before she married Simmons, Mrs Simmons had been the widowed Mrs Ford. Ford had got a berth as donkeyman on a tramp steamer, and that steamer had gone down with all hands off the Cape: a judgment, the widow woman feared, for long years of contumacy which had culminated

in the wickedness of taking to the sea, and taking to it as a donkeyman—an immeasurable fall for a capable engine-fitter. Twelve years as Mrs Ford had left her still childless, and childless she remained as Mrs Simmons.

As for Simmons, he, it was held, was fortunate in that capable wife. He was a moderately good carpenter and joiner, but no man of the world, and he wanted one. Nobody could tell what might not have happened to Tommy Simmons if there had been no Mrs Simmons to take care of him. He was a meek and quiet man, with a boyish face and sparse, limp whiskers. He had no vices (even his pipe departed him after his marriage), and Mrs Simmons had engrafted on him divers exotic virtues. He went solemnly to chapel every Sunday, under a tall hat, and put a penny—one returned to him for the purpose out of his week's wages—in the plate. Then, Mrs Simmons overseeing, he took off his best clothes and brushed them with solicitude and pains. On Saturday afternoons he

cleaned the knives, the forks, the boots, the kettles and the windows, patiently and conscientiously. On Tuesday evenings he took the clothes to the mangling. And on Saturday nights he attended Mrs Simmons in her marketing, to carry the parcels.

Mrs Simmons's own virtues were native and numerous. She was a wonderful manager. Every penny of Tommy's thirty-six or thirty-eight shillings a week was bestowed to the greatest advantage, and Tommy never ventured to guess how much of it she saved. Her cleanliness in housewifery was distracting to behold. She met Simmons at the front door whenever he came home, and then and there he changed his boots for slippers, balancing himself painfully on alternate feet on the cold flags. This was because she scrubbed the passage and doorstep turn about with the wife of the downstairs family, and because the stair-carpet was her own. She vigilantly supervised her husband all through the process of 'cleaning himself' after work,

so as to come between her walls and the possibility of random splashes; and if, in spite of her diligence a spot remained to tell the tale, she was at pains to impress the fact on Simmons's memory, and to set forth at length all the circumstances of his ungrateful selfishness. In the beginning she had always escorted him to the ready-made clothes shop, and had selected and paid for his clothes: for the reason that men are such perfect fools, and shopkeepers do as they like with them. But she presently improved on that. She found a man selling cheap remnants at a street corner, and straightway she conceived the idea of making Simmons's clothes herself. Decision was one of her virtues, and a suit of uproarious check tweeds was begun that afternoon from the pattern furnished by an old one. More: it was finished by Sunday; when Simmons, overcome by astonishment at the feat, was indued in it, and pushed off to chapel ere he could recover his senses. The things were not altogether comfortable, he found: the trousers

clung tight against his shins, but hung loose behind his heels; and when he sat, it was on a wilderness of hard folds and seams. Also his waistcoat collar tickled his nape, but his coat collar went straining across from shoulder to shoulder; while the main garment bagged generously below his waist. Use made a habit of his discomfort, but it never reconciled him to the chaff of his shopmates; for as Mrs Simmons elaborated successive suits, each one modelled on the last, the primal accidents of her design developed into principles, and grew even bolder and more hideously pronounced. It was vain for Simmons to hint—as hint he did—that he shouldn't like her to overwork herself, tailoring being bad for the eyes, and there was a new tailor's in the Mile End Road, very cheap, where . . . 'Ho yus,' she retorted, 'you're very consid'rit I dessay sittin' there actin' a livin' lie before your own wife Thomas Simmons as though I couldn't see through you like a book. A lot you care about overworkin' me as long as

your turn's served throwin' away money like dirt in the street on a lot o' swindlin' tailors an' me workin' an' slavin' 'ere to save a 'apenny an' this is my return for it anyone 'ud think you could pick up money in the 'orseroad an' I b'lieve I'd be thought better of if I laid in bed all day like some would that I do.' So that Thomas Simmons avoided the subject, nor even murmured when she resolved to cut his hair.

So his placid fortune endured for years. Then there came a golden summer evening when Mrs Simmons betook herself with a basket to do some small shopping, and Simmons was left at home. He washed and put away the tea-things, and then he fell to meditating on a new pair of trousers, finished that day and hanging behind the parlour door. There they hung, in all their decent innocence of shape in the seat, and they were shorter of leg, longer of waist, and wilder of pattern than he had ever worn before. And as he looked on them the small devil of Original Sin awoke and clamoured in his breast. He was

ashamed of it, of course, for well he knew the gratitude he owed his wife for those same trousers, among other blessings. Still, there the small devil was, and the small devil was fertile in base suggestions, and could not be kept from hinting at the new crop of workshop gibes that would spring at Tommy's first public appearance in such things.

'Pitch 'em in the dustbin!' said the small devil at last; 'it's all they're fit for.'

Simmons turned away in sheer horror of his wicked self, and for a moment thought of washing the tea-things over again by way of discipline. Then he made for the back room, but saw from the landing that the front door was standing open, probably by the fault of the child downstairs. Now a front door standing open was a thing that Mrs Simmons would *not* abide: it looked low. So Simmons went down, that she might not be wroth with him for the thing when she came back; and, as he shut the door, he looked forth into the street.

A man was loitering on the pavement, and prying curiously about the door. His face was tanned, his hands were deep in the pockets of his unbraced blue trousers, and well back on his head he wore the high-crowned peaked cap topped with a knob of wool, which is affected by Jack ashore about the docks. He lurched a step nearer to the door and, 'Mrs Ford ain't in, is she?' he said.

Simmons stared at him for a matter of five seconds, and then said, 'Eh?'

'Mrs Ford as was, then—Simmons now, ain't it?'

He said this with a furtive leer that Simmons neither liked nor understood.

'No,' said Simmons, 'she ain't in now.'

'You ain't her 'usband, are ye?'

'Yus.'

The man took his pipe from his mouth, and grinned silently and long. 'Blimy,' he said at length, 'you look the sort o' bloke she'd like,'—and with that he grinned again. Then, seeing

that Simmons made ready to shut the door, he put a foot on the sill and a hand against the panel. 'Don't be in a 'urry, matey,' he said, 'I come 'ere t'ave a little talk with you, man to man, d'ye see?' And he frowned fiercely.

Tommy Simmons felt uncomfortable, but the door would not shut, so he parleyed. 'Wot-jer want?' he asked. 'I dunno you.'

'Then if you'll excuse the liberty, I'll inter-dooce meself, in a manner of speaking.' He touched his cap with a bob of mock humility. 'I'm Bob Ford,' he said, 'come back out o' kingdom-come, so to say. Me as went down with the *Mooltan*—safe dead five year gone. I come to see my wife.'

During this speech Thomas Simmons's jaw was dropping lower and lower. At the end of it he poked his fingers up through his hair, looked down at the mat, then up at the fan-light, then out into the street, then hard at his visitor. But he found nothing to say.

'Come to see my wife,' the man repeated.

'So now we can talk it over — as man to man.'

Simmons slowly shut his mouth, and led the way upstairs mechanically, his fingers still in his hair. A sense of the state of affairs sank gradually into his brain, and the small devil woke again. Suppose this man *was* Ford? Suppose he *did* claim his wife? Would it be a knock-down blow? Would it hit him out?—or not? He thought of the trousers, the tea-things, the mangling, the knives, the kettles and the windows; and he thought of them in the way of a backslider.

On the landing Ford clutched at his arm, and asked in a hoarse whisper: ''Ow long 'fore she's back?'

''Bout a hour, I expect,' Simmons replied, having first of all repeated the question in his own mind. And then he opened the parlour door.

'Ah,' said Ford, looking about him, 'you've bin pretty comf'table. Them chairs an' things—'

jerking his pipe toward them—'was hers—mine that is to say, speaking straight, and man to man.' He sat down, puffing meditatively at his pipe, and presently: 'Well,' he continued, ''ere I am agin, ol' Bob Ford dead an' done for—gawn down in the *Mooltan.* On'y I *ain't* done for, see?'—and he pointed the stem of his pipe at Simmons's waistcoat—'I ain't done for, 'cause why? Cons'kence o' bein' picked up by a ol' German sailin'-'utch an' took to 'Frisco 'fore the mast. I've 'ad a few years o' knockin' about since then, an' now'—looking hard at Simmons—'I've come back to see my wife.'

'She—she don't like smoke in 'ere,' said Simmons, as it were at random.

'No, I bet she don't,' Ford answered, taking his pipe from his mouth, and holding it low in his hand. 'I know 'Anner. 'Ow d'you find 'er? Do she make ye clean the winders?'

'Well,' Simmons admitted uneasily, 'I—I do 'elp 'er sometimes, o' course.'

'Ah. An' the knives too, I bet, an' the

bloomin' kittles. I know. Wy—' he rose and bent to look behind Simmons's head—' s'elp me, I b'lieve she cuts yer 'air! Well, I'm damned! Jes' wot she would do, too.'

He inspected the blushing Simmons from divers points of vantage. Then he lifted a leg of the trousers hanging behind the door. ' I'd bet a trifle,' he said, ' she made these 'ere trucks. Nobody else 'ud do 'em like that. Damme—they're wuss'n wot you're got on.'

The small devil began to have the argument all its own way. If this man took his wife back perhaps he'd have to wear those trousers.

' Ah!' Ford pursued, ' she ain't got no milder. An' my davy, wot a jore!'

Simmons began to feel that this was no longer his business. Plainly, 'Anner was this other man's wife, and he was bound in honour to acknowledge the fact. The small devil put it to him as a matter of duty.

' Well,' said Ford suddenly, ' time's short an' this ain't business. I won't be 'ard on you,

matey. I ought prop'ly to stand on my rights, but seein' as you're a well-meanin' young man, so to speak, an' all settled an' a-livin' 'ere quiet an' matrimonual, I'll'—this with a burst of generosity—'damme, yus, I'll compound the felony, an' take me 'ook. Come, I'll name a figure, as man to man, fust an' last, no less an' no more. Five pound does it.'

Simmons hadn't five pounds—he hadn't even five pence—and he said so. 'An' I wouldn't think for to come between a man an' 'is wife,' he added 'not on no account. It may be rough on me, but it's a dooty. *I'll* 'ook it.'

'No,' said Ford hastily, clutching Simmons by the arm, 'don't do that. I'll make it a bit cheaper. Say three quid—come, that's reasonable, ain't it? Three quid ain't much compensation for me goin' away for ever—where the stormy winds do blow, so to say—an' never as much as seein' me own wife agin for better nor wuss. Between man an' man now —three quid; an' I'll shunt. That's fair, ain't it?'

'Of course it's fair,' Simmons replied effusively.

'It's more'n fair: it's noble—downright noble, *I* call it. But I ain't goin' to take a mean advantage o' your good-'artedness, Mr Ford. She's your wife, an' I oughtn't to 'a' come between you. I apologise. You stop an' 'ave yer proper rights. It's me as ought to shunt, an' I will.' And he made a step toward the door.

''Old on,' quoth Ford, and got between Simmons and the door; 'don't do things rash. Look wot a loss it'll be to you with no 'ome to go to, an' nobody to look after ye, an' all that. It'll be dreadful. Say a couple—there, we won't quarrel, jest a single quid, between man an' man, an' I'll stand a pot out o' the money. You can easy raise a quid—the clock 'ud pretty nigh do it. A quid does it; an' I'll—'

There was a loud double-knock at the front door. In the East End a double-knock is always for the upstairs lodgers.

'Oo's that?' asked Bob Ford apprehensively.

'I'll see,' said Thomas Simmons in reply, and he made a rush for the staircase.

Bob Ford heard him open the front door. Then he went to the window, and, just below him, he saw the crown of a bonnet. It vanished, and borne to him from within the door there fell upon his ear the sound of a well-remembered female voice.

'Where ye goin' now with no 'at?' asked the voice sharply.

'Awright, 'Anner—there's—there's somebody upstairs to see you,' Simmons answered. And, as Bob Ford could see, a man went scuttling down the street in the gathering dusk. And behold, it was Thomas Simmons.

Ford reached the landing in three strides. His wife was still at the front door, staring after Simmons. He flung into the back room, threw open the window, dropped from the wash-house roof into the back-yard, scrambled desperately over the fence, and disappeared into the gloom. He was seen by no living soul. And that is why Simmons's base desertion—under his wife's very eyes, too—is still an astonishment to the neighbours.

BEHIND THE SHADE

BEHIND THE SHADE

THE street was the common East End street —two parallels of brick pierced with windows and doors. But at the end of one, where the builder had found a remnant of land too small for another six-roomer, there stood an odd box of a cottage, with three rooms and a wash-house. It had a green door with a well-blacked knocker round the corner; and in the lower window in front stood a 'shade of fruit'—a cone of waxen grapes and apples under a glass cover.

Although the house was smaller than the others, and was built upon a remnant, it was always a house of some consideration. In a street like this mere independence of pattern gives distinction. And a house inhabited by one sole family makes

a figure among houses inhabited by two or more, even though it be the smallest of all. And here the seal of respectability was set by the shade of fruit—a sign accepted in those parts. Now, when people keep a house to themselves, and keep it clean; when they neither stand at the doors nor gossip across back-fences; when, moreover, they have a well-dusted shade of fruit in the front window; and, especially, when they are two women who tell nobody their business: they are known at once for well-to-do, and are regarded with the admixture of spite and respect that is proper to the circumstances. They are also watched.

Still, the neighbours knew the history of the Perkinses, mother and daughter, in its main features, with little disagreement: having told it to each other, filling in the details when occasion seemed to serve. Perkins, ere he died, had been a shipwright; and this was when the shipwrights were the aristocracy of the work-shops, and he that worked more than three or four days a week

was counted a mean slave: it was long (in fact) before depression, strikes, iron plates, and collective blindness had driven shipbuilding to the Clyde. Perkins had laboured no harder than his fellows, had married a tradesman's daughter, and had spent his money with freedom; and some while after his death his widow and daughter came to live in the small house, and kept a school for tradesmen's little girls in a back room over the wash-house. But as the School Board waxed in power, and the tradesmen's pride in regard thereunto waned, the attendance, never large, came down to twos and threes. Then Mrs Perkins met with her accident. A dweller in Stidder's Rents overtook her one night, and, having vigorously punched her in the face and the breast, kicked her and jumped on her for five minutes as she lay on the pavement. (In the dark, it afterwards appeared, he had mistaken her for his mother.) The one distinct opinion the adventure bred in the street was Mrs Webster's, the Little Bethelite, who considered it a judgment for sinful pride

—for Mrs Perkins had been a Church-goer. But the neighbours never saw Mrs Perkins again. The doctor left his patient 'as well as she ever would be,' but bed-ridden and helpless. Her daughter was a scraggy, sharp-faced woman of thirty or so, whose black dress hung from her hips as from a wooden frame; and some people got into the way of calling her Mrs Perkins, seeing no other thus to honour. And meantime, the school had ceased, although Miss Perkins essayed a revival, and joined a Dissenting chapel to that end.

Then, one day, a card appeared in the window, over the shade of fruit, with the legend 'Piano-forte Lessons.' It was not approved by the street. It was a standing advertisement of the fact that the Perkinses had a piano, which others had not. It also revealed a grasping spirit on the part of people able to keep a house to themselves, with red curtains and a shade of fruit in the parlour window; who, moreover, had been able to give up keeping a school because

of ill-health. The pianoforte lessons were eight-and-sixpence a quarter, two a week. Nobody was ever known to take them but the relieving officer's daughter, and she paid sixpence a lesson, to see how she got on, and left off in three weeks. The card stayed in the window a fortnight longer, and none of the neighbours saw the cart that came in the night and took away the old cabinet piano with the channelled keys, that had been fourth-hand when Perkins bought it twenty years ago. Mrs Clark, the widow who sewed far into the night, may possibly have heard a noise and looked; but she said nothing if she did. There was no card in the window next morning, but the shade of fruit stood primly respectable as ever. The curtains were drawn a little closer across, for some of the children playing in the street were used to flatten their faces against the lower panes, and to discuss the piano, the stuff-bottomed chairs, the antimacassars, the mantelpiece ornaments, and the loo table with the family Bible and the album on it.

It was soon after this that the Perkinses altogether ceased from shopping—ceased, at any rate, in that neighbourhood. Trade with them had already been dwindling, and it was said that Miss Perkins was getting stingier than her mother—who had been stingy enough herself. Indeed, the Perkins demeanour began to change for the worse, to be significant of a miserly retirement and an offensive alienation from the rest of the street. One day the deacon called, as was his practice now and then; but, being invited no further than the doorstep, he went away in dudgeon, and did not return. Nor, indeed, was Miss Perkins seen again at chapel.

Then there was a discovery. The spare figure of Miss Perkins was seldom seen in the streets, and then almost always at night; but on these occasions she was observed to carry parcels, of varying wrappings and shapes. Once, in broad daylight, with a package in newspaper, she made such haste past a shop-window where stood Mrs Webster and Mrs Jones, that she tripped on the

broken sole of one shoe, and fell headlong. The newspaper broke away from its pins, and although the woman reached and recovered her parcel before she rose, it was plain to see that it was made up of cheap shirts, cut out ready for the stitching. The street had the news the same hour, and it was generally held that such a taking of the bread out of the mouths of them that wanted it by them that had plenty was a scandal and a shame, and ought to be put a stop to. And Mrs Webster, foremost in the setting right of things, undertook to find out whence the work came, and to say a few plain words in the right quarter.

All this while nobody watched closely enough to note that the parcels brought in were fewer than the parcels taken out. Even a hand-truck, late one evening, went unremarked: the door being round the corner, and most people within. One morning, though, Miss Perkins, her best foot foremost, was venturing along a near street with an outgoing parcel—large and triangular and

wrapped in white drugget—when the relieving officer turned the corner across the way.

The relieving officer was a man in whose system of etiquette the Perkinses had caused some little disturbance. His ordinary female acquaintances (not, of course, professional) he was in the habit of recognising by a gracious nod. When he met the minister's wife he lifted his hat, instantly assuming an intense frown, in the event of irreverent observation. Now he quite felt that the Perkinses were entitled to some advance upon the nod, although it would be absurd to raise them to a level with the minister's wife. So he had long since established a compromise: he closed his finger and thumb upon the brim of his hat, and let his hand fall forthwith. Preparing now to accomplish this salute, he was astounded to see that Miss Perkins, as soon as she was aware of his approach, turned her face, which was rather flushed, away from him, and went hurrying onward, looking at the wall on her side of the

street. The relieving officer, checking his hand on its way to his hat, stopped and looked after her as she turned the corner, hugging her parcel on the side next the wall. Then he shouldered his umbrella and pursued his way, holding his head high, and staring fiercely straight before him; for a relieving officer is not used to being cut.

It was a little after this that Mr Crouch, the landlord, called. He had not been calling regularly, because of late Miss Perkins had left her five shillings of rent with Mrs Crouch every Saturday evening. He noted with satisfaction the whitened sills and the shade of fruit, behind which the curtains were now drawn close and pinned together. He turned the corner and lifted the bright knocker. Miss Perkins half opened the door, stood in the opening, and began to speak.

His jaw dropped. 'Beg pardon—forgot something. Won't wait—call next week—do just as well'; and he hurried round the corner and

down the street, puffing and blowing and staring. 'Why, the woman frightened me,' he afterward explained to Mrs Crouch. 'There's something wrong with her eyes, and she looked like a corpse. The rent wasn't ready —I could see that before she spoke; so I cleared out.'

'P'r'aps something's happened to the old lady,' suggested Mrs Crouch. 'Anyhow, I should think the rent 'ud be all right.' And he thought it would.

Nobody saw the Perkinses that week. The shade of fruit stood in its old place, but was thought not to have been dusted after Tuesday. Certainly the sills and the doorstep were neglected. Friday, Saturday and Sunday were swallowed up in a choking brown fog, wherein men lost their bearings, and fell into docks, and stepped over embankment edges. It was as though a great blot had fallen, and had obliterated three days from the calendar. It cleared on Monday morning, and, just as the women in

the street were sweeping their steps, Mr Crouch was seen at the green door. He lifted the knocker, dull and sticky now with the foul vapour, and knocked a gentle rat-tat. There was no answer. He knocked again, a little louder, and waited, listening. But there was neither voice nor movement within. He gave three heavy knocks, and then came round to the front window. There was the shade of fruit, the glass a little duller on the top, the curtains pinned close about it, and nothing to see beyond them. He tapped at the window with his knuckles, and backed into the roadway to look at the one above. This was a window with a striped holland blind and a short net curtain; but never a face was there.

The sweepers stopped to look, and one from opposite came and reported that she had seen nothing of Miss Perkins for a week, and that certainly nobody had left the house that morning. And Mr Crouch grew excited, and bellowed through the keyhole.

In the end they opened the sash-fastening with a knife, moved the shade of fruit, and got in. The room was bare and empty, and their steps and voices resounded as those of people in an unfurnished house. The washhouse was vacant, but it was clean, and there was a little net curtain in the window. The short passage and the stairs were bare boards. In the back room by the stair-head was a drawn window-blind, and that was all. In the front room with the striped blind and the short curtain there was a bed of rags and old newspapers; also a wooden box; and on each of these was a dead woman.

Both deaths, the doctor found, were from syncope, the result of inanition; and the better-nourished woman—she on the bed—had died the sooner; perhaps by a day or two. The other case was rather curious; it exhibited a degree of shrinkage in the digestive organs unprecedented in his experience. After the inquest the street had an evening's fame: for the papers printed

coarse drawings of the house, and in leaderettes demanded the abolition of something. Then it became its wonted self. And it was doubted if the waxen apples and the curtains fetched enough to pay Mr Crouch his fortnight's rent.

THREE ROUNDS

THREE ROUNDS

AT six o'clock the back streets were dank and black; but once in the Bethnal Green Road, blots and flares of gas and naphtha shook and flickered till every slimy cobble in the cart-way was silver-tipped. Neddy Milton was not quite fighting-fit. A day's questing for an odd job had left him weary in the feet; and a lad of eighteen cannot comfortably go unfed from breakfast to night-fall. But box he must, for the shilling was irrecoverable, and so costly a chance must not be thrown away. It was by a bout with the gloves that he looked to mend his fortunes. That was his only avenue of advancement. He could read and write quite decently, and in the beginning might even have

been an office-boy, if only the widow his mother, had been able to give him a good send-off in the matter of clothes. Also, he had had one chance of picking up a trade, but the firm already employed as many boys as the union was disposed to allow. So Neddy had to go, and pick up such stray jobs as he might.

It had been a bad day, without a doubt. Things were bad generally. It was nearly a fortnight since Ned had lost his last job, and there seemed to be no other in the world. His mother had had no slop-waistcoat finishing to do for three or four days, and he distinctly remembered that rather less than half a loaf was left after breakfast; so that it would never do to go home, for at such a time the old woman had a trick of pretending not to be hungry, and of starving herself. He almost wished that shilling of entrance-money back in his pocket. There is a deal of stuff to be bought for a shilling: fried fish, for instance, whereof the aromas, warm and rank, met him thrice in a

hundred yards, and the frizzle, loud or faint, sang in his ears all along the Bethnal Green Road. His shilling had been paid over but two days before the last job gave out, and it would be useful now. Still, the investment might turn out a gold mine. Luck must change. Meanwhile, as to being hungry—well, there was always another hole in the belt!

The landlord of the Prince Regent public house had a large room behind his premises, which, being moved by considerations of sport and profit in doubtful proportions, he devoted two nights a week to the uses of the Regent Boxing Club. Here Neddy Milton, through a long baptism of pummellings, had learned the trick of a straight lead, a quick counter, and a timely duck; and here, in the nine-stone competition to open this very night, he might perchance punch wide the gates of Fortune. For some sporting publican, or discriminating bookmaker from Bow, might see and approve his sparring, and start him fairly, with money behind

him—a professional. That would mean a match in six or eight weeks' time, with good living in the meanwhile: a match that would have to be won, of course. And after that . . . !

Twice before he had boxed in a competition. Once he won his bout in the first round, and was beaten in the second; and once he was beaten in the first, but that was by the final winner, Tab Rosser, who was now matched for a hundred a side, sparred exhibition bouts up west, wore a light Newmarket coat, and could stand whisky and soda with anybody. To be 'taken up' on the strength of these early performances was more than he could reasonably expect. There might be luck in the third trial; but he would like to feel a little fitter. Breakfast (what there was of it) had been ten hours ago, and since there had been but a half-pint of four-ale. It was the treat of a well-meaning friend, but it lay cold on the stomach for want of solid company.

Turning into Cambridge Road, he crossed, and

went on among the by-streets leading toward Globe Road. Now and again a slight aspersion of fine rain came down the gusts, and further damped his cap and shoulders and the ragged hair that hung over his collar. Also a cold spot under one foot gave him fears of a hole in his boot-sole as he tramped in the chilly mud.

In the Prince Regent there were many at the bar, and the most of them knew Neddy.

'Wayo, Ned,' said one lad with a pitted face, '*you* don't look much of a bleed'n' champion. 'Ave a drop o' beer.'

Ned took a sparing pull at the pot, and wiped his mouth on his sleeve. A large man behind him guffawed, and Neddy reddened high. He had heard the joke. The man himself was one of the very backers that might make one's fortune, and the man's companion thought it would be unsafe to back Neddy to fight anything but a beefsteak.

'You're drawed with Patsy Beard,' one of

Ned's friends informed him. 'You'll 'ave to buck up.'

This was bad. Patsy Beard, on known form, stood best chance of winning the competition, and to have to meet him at first set-off was ill luck, and no mistake. He was a thickset little butcher, and there was just the ghost of a hope that he might be found to be a bit over the weight.

A lad by the bar looked inquiringly in Ned's face and then came toward him, shouldering him quietly out of the group. It was Sam Young, whom Neddy had beaten in an earlier competition. ''Ungry, Neddy?' he asked, in a corner.

It was with a shamed face that Neddy confessed; for among those in peril of hunger it is disgraceful to be hungry. Sam unpocketed a greasy paper, enveloping a pallid sausage-roll. ''Ave 'alf o' this,' he said. It was a heavy and a clammy thing, but Ned took it, furtively swallowed a large piece, and returned the rest with sheepish thanks. He did not turn again toward the others, but

went through to the room where the ring was pitched.

The proceedings began. First there were exhibition bouts, to play in the company. Neddy fidgeted. Why couldn't they begin the competition at once? When they did, his bout would be number five. That would mean at least an hour of waiting; and the longer he waited the less fit he would feel.

In time the exhibition sparring was ended, and the real business began. He watched the early bouts feverishly, feeling unaccountably anxious. The lads looked strong and healthy. Patsy Beard was as strong as any of them, and heavy. Could he stand it? This excited nervousness was new and difficult to understand. He had never felt like it before. He was almost trembling; and that lump of sausage-roll had stuck half-way, and made breathing painful work. Patsy Beard was at the opposite corner, surrounded by admirers. He was red-faced, well-fed, fleshy, and confident. His short hair

clung shinily about his bullet head. Neddy noted a small piece of court-plaster at the side of his nose. Plainly there was a tender spot, and it must be gone for, be it cut, or scratch, or only pimple. On the left side, too, quite handy. Come, there was some comfort in that.

He fell to watching the bout. It was a hard fight, and both the lads were swinging the right again and again for a knock-out. But the pace was too hot, and they were soon breathing like men about to sneeze, wearily pawing at each other, while their heads hung forward. Somebody jogged him in the back, and he found he must get ready. His dressing was simple. All ill-conditioned old pair of rubber gymnasium shoes replaced his equally ill-conditioned bluchers, and a cotton singlet his shirt; but his baggy corduroys, ragged at the ankles and doubtful at the seat, remained.

Presently the last pair of boxers was brought into the dressing-room, and one of the seconds, a battered old pug with one eye, at once seized

Neddy. 'Come along, young 'un,' he said. 'I'm your bloke. Got no flannels? Awright. Jump on the scales.'

There was no doubt as to the weight. He had scaled at eight stone thirteen; now it was eight stone bare. Patsy Beard, on the other hand, weighed the full nine, without an ounce to spare.

'You're givin' 'im a stone,' said the old pug; 'all the more credit 'idin' of 'im. 'Ere, let's shove 'em on. Feel 'em.' He grinned and blinked his solitary eye as he pulled on Neddy's hand one of a very black and long-worn pair of boxing-gloves. They were soft and flaccid; Neddy's heart warmed toward the one-eyed man, for well he knew from many knocks that the softer the glove the harder the fist feels through it. 'Sawftest pair in the place, s'elp me,' grunted the second, with one glove hanging from his teeth. 'My lad 'ad 'em last time. Come on.'

He snatched a towel and a bottle of water,

and hurried Neddy from the dressing-room to the ring. Neddy sat in his chair in the ring-corner, and spread his arms on the ropes: while his second, arms uplifted, stood before him and ducked solemnly forward and back with the towel flicking overhead. While he was fanning, Neddy was still conscious of the lump of sausage-roll in his chest. Also he fell to wondering idly why they called Beard Patsy, when his first name was Joe. The same reflection applied to Tab Rosser, and Hocko Jones, and Tiggy Magson. But certainly he felt hollow and sick in the belly. Could he stand punching? It would never do to chuck it half through. Still—

'Ready!' sang the timekeeper.

The old pug threw the towel over his arm. ''Ave a moistener,' he said, presenting the water-bottle to Neddy's mouth. 'Don't swaller any,' he added, as his principal took a large gulp. 'Spit it out.'

'Seconds out of the ring!'

The old prize-fighter took his bottle and climbed

through the ropes. 'Don't go in-fightin', he whispered from behind. 'Mark 'im on the stickin'-plaster; an' if you don't give 'im a 'idin', bli' me, I'll give you one!'

'Time!'

The seconds seized the chairs and dragged them out of the ring, as the lads advanced and shook hands. Patsy Beard flung back his right foot, and made a flashy prance with his left knee as they began to spar for an opening: it was Patsy's way. All Neddy's anxiety was gone. The moment his right foot dropped behind his left, and his left hand rocked, knuckles up, before him, he was a competent workman, with all his tools in order. Even the lump of dough on his chest he felt no more.

'Buy, buy!' bawled a wag in the crowd, as a delicate allusion to Beard's more ordinary occupation. Patsy grinned at the compliment, but Neddy confined his attention to business. He feinted with his left, and got back; but Patsy was not to be drawn. Then Neddy stepped in

and led quickly, ducking the counter and repeating before getting away. Patsy came with a rush and fought for the body, but Neddy slipped him, and got in one for nothing on the ear. The company howled.

They sparred in the middle. Patsy led perfunctorily with the left now and again, while his right elbow undulated nervously. That foretold an attempt to knock out with the right : precautions, a straight and persistent left and a wary eye. So Neddy kept poking out his left, and never lost sight of the court-plaster, never of the shifty right. Give and take was the order of the round, and they fought all over the ring, Patsy Beard making for close quarters, and Neddy keeping off, and stopping him with the left. Neddy met a straight punch on the nose that made his eyes water, but through the tears he saw the plaster displaced, and a tiny stream of blood trickling toward the corner of Patsy's mouth. Plainly it was a cut. He broke ground, stopped half-way and banged in left and right. He got

a sharp drive on the neck for his pains, and took the right on his elbow; but he had landed on the spot, and the tiny streak of blood was smeared out wide across Patsy's face. The company roared and whistled with enthusiasm. It was a capital rally.

But now Neddy's left grew slower, and was heavy to lift. From time to time Patsy got in one for nothing, and soon began to drive him about the ring. Neddy fought on, weak and gasping, and longed for the call of time. His arms felt as they were hung with lead, and he could do little more than push feebly. He heard the yell of many voices: 'Now then, Patsy, hout him! 'Ave' im out! That's it, Patsy, another like that! Keep on, Patsy!'

Patsy kept on. Right and left, above and below, Neddy could see the blows coming. But he was powerless to guard or to return. He could but stagger about, and now and again swing an ineffectual arm as it hung from the shoulder. Presently a flush hit on the nose drove him

against the ropes, another in the ribs almost through them. But a desperate, wide whirl of his right brought it heavily on Patsy's tender spot, and tore open the cut. Patsy winced, and—

'Time!'

Neddy was grabbed at the waist and put in his chair. 'Good lad!' said the one-eyed pug in his ear as he sponged his face. 'Nothink like pluck. But you mustn't go to pieces 'alf through the round. Was it a awk'ard poke upsetcher?'

Neddy, lying back and panting wildly, shook his head as he gazed at the ceiling.

'Awright; try an' save yourself a bit. Keep yer left goin'—you roasted 'im good with that; 'e'll want a yard o' plaster to-night. An' when 'e gits leadin' loose, take it auf an' give him the right straight from the guard—if you know the trick. Point o' the jaw that's for, mind. 'Ave a cooler.' He took a mouthful of water and blew it in a fine spray in Neddy's face, wiped

it down, and began another overhead fanning.

'Seconds out of the ring!' called the timekeeper.

'Go it my lad'—thus a whisper from behind—'you can walk over 'im!' And Neddy felt the wet sponge squeezed against the back of his neck, and the cool water trickling down his spine.

'Time!'

Neddy was better, though there was a worn feeling in his arm-muscles. Patsy's cut had been well sponged, but it still bled, and Patsy meant giving Neddy no rest. He rushed at once, but was met by a clean right-hander, slap on the sore spot. 'Bravo, Neddy!' came a voice, and the company howled as before. Patsy was steadied. He sparred with some caution, twitching the cheek next the cut. Neddy would not lead (for he must save himself), and so the two sparred for a few seconds. Then Patsy rushed again, and Neddy got busy with both hands.

Once he managed to get the right in from the guard as his second had advised, but not heavily. He could feel his strength going—earlier than in the last round—and Patsy was as strong and determined as ever. Another rush carried Neddy against the ropes, where he got two heavy body blows and a bad jaw-rattler. He floundered to the right in an attempt to slip, and fell on his face. He rolled on his side, however, and was up again, breathless and unsteady. There was a sickening throbbing in the crown of his head, and he could scarce lift his arms. But there was no respite: the other lad was at him again, and he was driven across the ring and back, blindly pushing his aching arms before him, while punch followed punch on nose, ears, jaws, and body, till something began to beat inside his head, louder and harder than all beside, stunning and sickening him. He could hear the crowd roaring still, but it seemed further off; and the yells of 'That's it, Patsy! Now you're got 'im! Keep at 'im! Hout 'im

this time!'—came from some other building close by, where somebody was getting a bad licking. Somebody with no control of his legs, and no breath to spit away the blood from his nose as it ran and stuck over his lips. Somebody praying for the end of the three minutes that seemed three hours, and groaning inwardly because of a lump of cold lead in his belly that had once been sausage-roll. Somebody to whom a few called—still in the other building—'Chuck it, Neddy; it's no good. Why don'cher chuck it?' while others said, 'Take 'im away, tyke 'im away!' Then something hit him between the eyes, and some other thing behind the head; that was one of the posts. He swung an arm, but it met nothing; then the other, and it struck somewhere; and then there was a bang that twisted his head, and hard boards were against his face. O it was bad, but it was a rest.

Cold water was on his face, and somebody spoke. He was in his chair again, and the one-eyed man was sponging him. 'It was the call

o' time as saved ye then,' he said; 'you'd never 'a' got up in the ten seconds. Y'aint up to another round, are ye? Better chuck it. It's no disgrace, after the way you've stood up.' But Neddy shook his head. He had got through two of the three rounds, and didn't mean throwing away a chance of saving the bout.

'Awright, if you won't,' his Mentor said. 'Nothink like pluck. But you're no good on points—a knock-out's the on'y chance. Nurse yer right, an' give it 'im good on the point. 'E's none so fresh 'isself; 'e's blowed with the work, an' you pasted 'im fine when you did 'it. Last thing, just before 'e sent ye down, ye dropped a 'ot 'un on 'is beak. Didn't see it, didjer?' The old bruiser rubbed vigorously at his arms, and gave him a small, but welcome, drink of water.

'Seconds out of the ring!'

The one-eyed man was gone once more, but again his voice came from behind. 'Mind—

give it 'im 'ard and give it 'im soon, an' if you feel groggy, chuck it d'reckly. If ye don't, I'll drag ye out by the slack o' yer trousis an' disgrace ye.'

'Time!'

Neddy knew there was little more than half a minute's boxing left in him—perhaps not so much. He must do his best at once. Patsy was showing signs of hard wear, and still blew a little: his nose was encouragingly crimson at the nostrils, and the cut was open and raw. He rushed in with a lead which Neddy ducked and cross-countered, though ineffectually. There were a few vigorous exchanges, and then Neddy staggered back from a straight drive on the mouth. There was a shout of 'Patsy!' and Patsy sprang in, right elbow all a-jerk, and flung in the left. Neddy guarded wildly, and banged in the right from the guard. Had he hit? He had felt no shock, but there was Patsy, lying on his face.

The crowd roared and roared again. The

old pug stuffed his chair hastily through the ropes, and Neddy sank into it, panting, with bloodshot eyes. Patsy lay still. The time-keeper watched the seconds-hand pass its ten points, and gave the word, but Patsy only moved a leg. Neddy Milton had won.

'Brayvo, young 'un,' said the old fighter, as he threw his arm about Neddy's waist, and helped him to the dressing-room. 'Cleanest knock-out I ever see—smack on the point o' the jaw. Never thought you'd 'a' done it. I said there was nothink like pluck, did'n' I? 'Ave a wash now, an' you'll be all the better for the exercise. Give us them gloves—I'm off for the next bout.' And he seized another lad, and marched him out.

''Ave a drop o' beer,' said one of Neddy's new-won friends, extending a tankard. He took it, though he scarcely felt awake. He was listless and weak, and would not have moved for an hour had he been left alone. But Patsy was brought to, and sneezed loudly,

and Neddy was hauled over to shake hands with him.

'You give me a 'ell of a doin',' said Neddy, '*I* never thought I'd beat you.'

'Beat me? well you ain't, 'ave you? 'Ow?'

'Knock-out,' answered several at once.

'Well I'm damned,' said Patsy Beard. . . .

In the bar, after the evening's business, Neddy sat and looked wistfully at the stout red-faced men who smoked fourpenny cigars and drank special Scotch; but not one noticed him. His luck had not come after all. But there was the second round of bouts, and the final, in a week's time—perhaps it would come then. If he could only win the final—then it *must* come. Meanwhile he was sick and faint, and felt doubtful about getting home. Outside it was raining hard. He laid his head on the bar table at which he was sitting, and at closing time there they found him asleep.

IN BUSINESS

IN BUSINESS

THERE was a great effervescence of rumour in Cubitt Town when Ted Munsey came into money. Ted Munsey, commonly alluded to as Mrs Munsey's 'usband, was a moulder with a regular job at Moffat's: a large, quiet man of forty-five, the uncomplaining appurtenance of his wife. This was fitting, for she had married beneath her, her father having been a dock timekeeper.

To come into money is an unusual feat in Cubitt Town; a feat, nevertheless, continually contemplated among possibilities by all Cubitt Towners; who find nothing else in the Sunday paper so refreshing as the paragraphs headed 'Windfall for a Cabman' and 'A Fortune for a

Pauper,' and who cut them out to pin over the mantelpiece. The handsome colouring of such paragraphs was responsible for many bold flights of fancy in regard to Ted Munsey's fortune: Cubitt Town, left to itself, being sterile soil for the imagination. Some said that the Munseys had come in for chests packed with bank notes, on the decease of one of Mrs Munsey's relations, of whom she was wont to hint. Others put it at a street full of houses, as being the higher ideal of wealth. A few, more romantically given, imagined vaguely of ancestral lands and halls, which Mrs Munsey and her forebears had been 'done out of' for many years, by the lawyers. All which Mrs Munsey, in her hour of triumph, was at little pains to discount, although, in simple fact, the fortune was no more than a legacy of a hundred pounds from Ted's uncle, who had kept a public-house in Deptford.

Of the hundred pounds Mrs Munsey took immediate custody. There was no guessing

what would have become of it in Ted's hands; probably it would have been, in chief part, irrecoverably lent; certainly it would have gone and left Ted a moulder at Moffatt's, as before. With Mrs Munsey there was neither hesitation nor difficulty. The obvious use of a hundred pounds was to put its possessors into business—which meant a shop; to elevate them socially at a single bound beyond the many grades lying between the moulder and the small tradesman. Wherefore the Munseys straightway went into business. Being equally ignorant of every sort of shopkeeping, they were free to choose the sort they pleased; and thus it was that Mrs Munsey decided upon drapery and haberdashery, Ted's contribution to the discussion being limited to a mild hint of greengrocery and coals, instantly suppressed as low. Nothing could be more genteel than drapery, and it would suit the girls. General chandlery, sweetstuff, oil and firewood—all these were low, comparatively. Drapery it was, and quickly;

for Mrs Munsey was not wont to shilly-shally. An empty shop was found in Bromley, was rented, and was stocked as far as possible. Tickets were hung upon everything, bearing a very large main figure with a very small three-farthings beside it, and the thing was done. The stain of moulding was washed from the scutcheon; the descent thereunto from dock timekeeping was redeemed five-fold; dock timekeeping itself was left far below, with carpentering, shipwrighting, and engine-fitting. The Munseys were in business.

Ted Munsey stood about helplessly and stared, irksomely striving not to put his hands in his pockets, which was low; any lapse being instantly detected by Mrs Munsey, who rushed from all sorts of unexpected places and corrected the fault vigorously.

'I didn't go for to do it, Marier,' he explained penitently. 'It's 'abit. I'll get out of it soon. It don't look well, I know, in a business; but it do seem a comfort, somehow.'

'O you an' your comfort! A lot you study *my* comfort, Hedward!'—for he was Ted no more — 'a-toilin' an' a-moilin' with everything to think of myself while you look on with your 'ands in your pockets. Do try an' not look like a stuck ninny, do!' And Hedward, whose every attempt at help or suggestion had been severely repulsed, slouched uneasily to the door, and strove to look as business-like as possible.

'There you go again, stickin' in the doorway and starin' up an' down the street, as though there was no business doin''—there was none, but that might not be confessed. 'D'y' expect people to come in with you a-fillin' up the door? Do come in, do! You'd be better out o' the shop altogether.'

Hedward thought so too, but said nothing. He had been invested with his Sunday clothes of lustrous black, and brought into the shop to give such impression of a shop-walker as he might. He stood uneasily on alternate feet, and stared at the ceiling, the floor, or the space

before him, with an unhappy sense of being on show and not knowing what was expected of him. He moved his hands purposelessly, and knocked things down with his elbows; he rubbed his hair all up behind, and furtively wiped the resulting oil from his hand on his trousers: never looking in the least degree like a shop-walker.

The first customer was a very small child who came for a ha'porth of pins, and on whom Hedward gazed with much interest and respect, while Mrs Munsey handed over the purchase: abating not a jot of his appreciation when the child returned, later, to explain that what she really wanted was sewing cotton. Other customers were disappointingly few. Several old neighbours came in from curiosity, to talk and buy nothing. One woman, who looked at many things without buying, was discovered after her departure to have stolen a pair of stockings; and Hedward was duly abused for not keeping a sharp look-out while his wife's

back was turned. Finally, the shutters went up on a day's takings of three and sevenpence farthing, including a most dubious threepenny bit. But then, as Mrs Munsey said, when you are in business you must expect trade to vary; and of course there would be more customers when the shop got known; although Hedward certainly might have taken the trouble to find one in a busier thoroughfare. Hedward (whose opinion in that matter, as in others, had never been asked) retired to the back-yard to smoke a pipe—a thing he had been pining for all day: but was quickly recalled (the pipe being a clay) upon Mrs Munsey's discovery that the act could be observed from a neighbour's window. He was continually bringing the family into disgrace, and Mrs Munsey despaired aloud over him far into the night.

The days came and went, and trade varied, as a fact, very little indeed. Between three and sevenpence farthing and nothing the scope for fluctuation is small, and for some time the

first day's record was never exceeded. But on the fifth day a customer bought nearly seven shillings' worth all at once. Her husband had that day returned from sea with money, and she, after months of stint, indulged in an orgie of haberdashery at the nearest shop. Mrs Munsey was reassured. Trade was increasing; perhaps an assistant would be needed soon, in addition to the two girls.

Only the younger of the girls, by-the-bye, had as yet taken any active interest in the business: Emma, the elder, spending much of her time in a bedroom, making herself unpresentable by inordinate blubbering. This was because of Mrs Munsey's prohibition of more company-keeping with Jack Page. Jack was a plumber, just out of his time—rather a catch for a moulder's daughter, but impossible, of course, for the daughter of people in business, as Emma should have had the proper feeling to see for herself. This Emma had not: she wallowed in a luxury of woe, exacerbated on occasions to poignancy by

the scoldings and sometimes by the thumpings of her mar; and neglected even the select weekly quadrille class, membership whereof was part of the novel splendour.

But there was never again a seven-shilling customer. The state of trade perplexed Mrs Munsey beyond telling. Being in business, one must, by the circumstance, have a genteel competence: this was an elementary axiom in Cubitt Town. But where was the money? What was the difference between this and other shops? Was a screw loose anywhere? In that case it certainly could not be her fault; wherefore she nagged Hedward.

One day a polite young man called in a large pony-trap and explained the whole mystery. Nobody could reasonably expect to succeed in a business of this sort who did not keep a good stock of the fancy aprons and lace bows made by the firm he was charged to represent. Of course, he knew what business was, and that cash was not always free, but that need never hinder

transactions with him: three months' credit was the regular thing with any respectable, well-established business concern, and in three months one would certainly sell all the fancy aprons and lace bows of this especial kind and price that one had room for. And he need scarcely remind a lady of Mrs Munsey's business experience that fancy aprons and lace bows—of the right sort—were by far the most profitable goods known to the trade. Everybody knew *that*. Should they say a gross of each, just to go on with? No? Well, then half a gross. These prices were cut so near that it really did not pay to split the gross, but this time, to secure a good customer, he would stretch a point. Mrs Munsey was enlightened. Plainly the secret of success in business was to buy advantageously, in the way the polite young man suggested, sell at a good price, and live on the profits: merely paying over the remainder at the end of three months. Nothing could be simpler. So she began the system forthwith. Other polite young

men called, and further certain profits were arranged for on similar terms.

The weak spot in the plan was the absence of any binding arrangement with the general public; and this was not long in discovering itself. Nobody came to buy the fancy aprons and the lace bows, tempting as they might seem. Moreover, after they had hung a week or more, Alice reported that a large shop in the Commercial Road was offering, by retail, aprons and bows of precisely the same sort at a less price than the polite young man had charged for a wholesale purchase. Mrs Munsey grew desperate, and Hedward's life became a horror unto him. He was set to stand at the door with a fancy apron in one hand and a lace bow in the other, and capture customers as they passed: a function wherein he achieved detestable failure; alarming passing women (who considered him dangerously drunk) as greatly as his situation distressed himself.

Mrs Munsey grew more desperate, and drove

Hedward to the rear of the house, with bitter revilings. Money must be got out of the stock somehow. That a shop could in any circumstances be unremunerative puzzled as much as it dismayed her. The goods were marked down to low prices—often lower than cost. Still Mrs Munsey had the abiding conviction that the affair must pay, as others did, if only she might hold out long enough. Hedward's suggestion that he should return to the moulding, coming and going as little in sight as possible, she repelled savagely. 'A nice notion you've got o' keepin' up a proper position. You ain't content with disgracin' me and yourself too, playin' the fool in the shop till trade's ruined an' nobody won't come near the place—an' I don't wonder at it. . . . You're a nice sort of 'usband, I must say. What are you goin' to do now, with the business in this pretty mess, an' your wife an' children ready to starve? What are you goin' to do? Where are you goin' to turn? That's what I want to know.'

'Well, I'm a-thinkin' it out, Marier, in a legal point. P'r'aps, you know, my dear—'

'Oh, don't dear me. I 'ate a fool.'

Marked as low as they might be, none of the aprons nor the bows nor the towels nor the stockings nor any other of the goods were bought—never a thing beyond a ha'porth of thread or a farthing bodkin. Rent had to be paid, and even food cost money. There was a flavour of blank disappointment about Saturday—the pay day of less anxious times; and quarter-day, when all these polite young men would demand the money that was not—that day was coming, black and soon. Mrs Munsey grew more desperate than ever; sharp of feature, and aged. Alone, she would probably have wept. Having Hedward at hand, she poured forth her bitterness of spirit upon him; till at last he was nagged out of his normal stolidity, and there came upon his face the look of a bullock that is harried on all hands through unfamiliar streets.

On a night when, from sheer weariness of

soul, she fell from clatter toward sleep, of a sudden Hedward spoke. 'Marier—' he said.

'Well?'

'You ain't give me a kiss lately. Kiss me now.'

'Don't be a fool. I'm sick an' tired. Go to sleep, if you can sleep, with everything—'

'Kiss me, I tell you!' He had never commanded like that before. She marvelled, feared a little, and obeyed.

In the morning, when she awoke, he had already gone downstairs. This was as usual. When she followed, however, he was not to be found in the house. The shop shutters had been taken down, and the windows carefully cleaned, although it was not the regular window-cleaning day; but the door was shut. On the sitting-room table were two papers, one within the other. The first was written with many faults and smudges, and this was how it ran:

'the deed and testiment of Ed. Munsey this

is to cirtiffy that i make over all my propperty to my belov[d] wife stock bisness and furnitur so help me god all detts i keep to pay myself and my wife is not ansrable for them and certiffy that I O U Minchin and co 9 pound 4/7½ Jones and son 6 pound 13/2 and settrer all other detts me and not my wife I O U

Ed. Munsey'

The other was a letter:

'my dear wife i have done this legle dockerment after thinking it out it will make you alrite having all made over and me still oawe the detts not you as you can pull round the bisness as you said with time and if you do not see me again will you pay the detts when it is pull round as we have been allways honnest and straght i should wish for Emma to keep co with Jhon Page if can be mannaged he might be shop walker and you will soon all be rich swels i know so no more from yours affec husband Ed. Munsey

love to Emma and Alice this one must be burnt keep the other'

Near the papers lay Ted Munsey's large silver watch and chain, the silver ring that he used to fasten his best tie, three keys, and a few coppers. Upstairs the girls began to move about. Mrs Munsey sat with her frightened face on the table.

THE RED COW GROUP

THE RED COW GROUP

THE Red Cow Anarchist Group no longer exists. Its leading spirit appears no more among his devoted comrades, and without him they are ineffectual.

He was but a young man, this leading spirit, (his name, by-the-bye was Sotcher), but of his commanding influence among the older but unlettered men about him, read and judge. For themselves, they had long been plunged in a beery apathy, neither regarding nor caring for the fearful iniquities of the social system that oppressed them. A Red Cow group they had always been, before the coming of Sotcher to make Anarchists of them: foregathering in a remote compart-

ment of the Red Cow bar, reached by a side door in an alley; a compartment uninvaded and almost undiscovered by any but themselves, where night after night they drank their beer and smoked their pipes, sunk in a stagnant ignorance of their manifold wrongs. During the day Old Baker remained to garrison the stronghold. He was a long-bankrupt tradesman, with invisible resources and no occupation but this, and no known lodging but the Red Cow snuggery. There he remained all day and every day, 'holding the fort' as he put it: with his nose, a fiery signal of possession, never two feet from the rim of his pot; while Jerry Shand was carrying heavy loads in Columbia Market; while Gunno Polson was running for a bookmaker in Fleet Street; while Snorkey was wherever his instinct took him, doing whatever paid best, and keeping out of trouble as long as he could; and while the rest of the group—two or three—picked a living out of the London heap in ways and places unspecified. But at evening,

they joined Old Baker, and they filled their snuggery.

Their talk was rarely of politics, and never of 'social problems': present and immediate facts filled their whole field of contemplation. Their accounts were kept, and their references to pecuniary matters were always stated, in terms of liquid measure. Thus, fourpence was never spoken of in the common way: it was a quart, and a quart was the monetary standard of the community. Even as twopence was a pint, and eightpence was half-a-gallon.

It was Snorkey who discovered Sotcher, and it was with Snorkey that that revolutionary appeared before the Red Cow group with his message of enlightenment. Snorkey (who was christened something else that nobody knew or cared about) had a trick of getting into extraordinary and unheard of places in his daily quest of quarts, and he had met Sotcher in a loft at the top of a house in Berners Street, Shadwell. It was a loft where the elect of Anarch-

ism congregated nightly, and where everybody lectured all the others. Sotcher was a very young Anarchist, restless by reason of not being sufficiently listened to, and glad to find outsiders to instruct and to impress with a full sense of his sombre, mystic dare-devilry. Therefore he came to the Red Cow with Snorkey, to spread (as he said) the light.

He was not received with enthusiasm, perhaps because of a certain unlaundered aspect of person remarkable even to them of the Red Cow group. Grease was his chief exterior characteristic, and his thick hair, turning up over his collar, seemed to have lain for long unharried of brush or comb. His face was a sebaceous trickle of long features, and on his hands there was a murky deposit that looked like scales. He wore, in all weathers, a long black coat with a rectangular rent in the skirt, and his throat he clipped in a brown neckerchief that on a time had been of the right Anarchist red. But no want of welcome could abash him. Here, indeed, he

had an audience, an audience that did not lecture on its own account, a crude audience that might take him at his own valuation. So he gave it to that crude audience, hot and strong. They (and he) were the salt of the earth, bullied, plundered and abused. Down with everything that wasn't down already. And so forth and so on.

His lectures were continued. Every night it was the same as every other, and each several chapter of his discourse was a repetition of the one before. Slowly the Red Cow group came round. Plainly other people were better off than they; and certainly each man found it hard to believe that anybody else was more deserving than himself.

'Wy are we pore?' asked Sotcher, leaning forward and jerking his extended palm from one to another, as though attempting a hasty collection. 'I ask you straight, wy are we pore? Why is it, my frien's that awften and awften you find you ain't got a penny in yer

pocket, not for to git a crust o' bread or 'alf a pint o' reasonable refreshment? 'Ow is it that 'appens? Agin I ask, 'ow?'

Snorkey, with a feeling that an answer was expected from somebody, presently murmured ,No mugs,' which encouraged Gunno Polson to suggest 'Backers all stony-broke.' Jerry Shand said nothing, but reflected on the occasional result of a day on the loose. Old Baker neither spoke nor thought.

'I'll tell you, me frien's. It's 'cos o' the rotten state o' s'ciety. Wy d'you allow the lazy, idle, dirty, do-nothing upper classes, as they call 'emselves, to reap all the benefits o' your toil wile you slave an' slave to keep 'em in lukshry an' starve yerselves? Wy don't you go an' take your shares o' the wealth lyin' round you?'

There was another pause. Gunno Polson looked at his friends one after another, spat emphatically, and said 'Coppers.'

'Becos o' the brute force as the privileged

classes is 'edged theirselves in with, that's all. Becos o' the paid myrmidons armed an' kep' to make slaves o' the people. Becos o' the magistrates an' p'lice. Then wy not git rid o' the magistrates an' p'lice? They're no good, are they? 'Oo wants 'em, I ask? 'Oo?'

'They *are* a noosance,' admitted Snorkey, who had done a little time himself. He was a mere groundling, and persisted in regarding the proceedings as simple conversation, instead of as an oration with pauses at the proper places.

'Nobody wants 'em—nobody as is any good. Then don't 'ave 'em, me frien's—don't 'ave 'em! It all rests with you. Don't 'ave no magistrates nor p'lice, nor gover'ment, nor parliament, nor monarchy, nor county council, nor nothink. Make a clean sweep of 'em. Blow 'em up. Then you'll 'ave yer rights. The time's comin', I tell you. It's comin', take my word for it. Now you toil an' slave; then everybody'll 'ave to work w'ether 'e likes it or not, and two hours work a day'll be all you'll 'ave to do.'

Old Baker looked a little alarmed, and for a moment paused in his smoking.

'Two hours a day at most, that's all; an' all yer wants provided for, free an' liberal.' Some of the group gave a lickerish look across the bar. 'No a'thority, no gover'ment, no privilege, an' nothink to interfere. Free contrack between man an' man, subjick to free revision an' change.'

'Wot's that?' demanded Jerry Shand, who was the slowest convert.

'Wy, that,' Sotcher explained, 'means that everybody can make wot arrangements with 'is feller-men 'e likes for to carry on the business of life, but nothink can't bind you. You chuck over the arrangement if it suits best.'

'Ah,' said Gunno Polson musingly, rotating his pot horizontally before him to stir the beer; 'that 'ud be 'andy sometimes. They call it welshin' now.'

The light spread fast and free, and in a few

nights the Red Cow group was a very promising little bed of anarchy. Sotcher was at pains to have it reported at two places west of Tottenham Court Road and at another in Dean Street, Soho, that at last a comrade had secured an excellent footing with a party of the proletariat of East London, hitherto looked on as hopeless material. More: that an early manifestation of activity might be expected in that quarter. Such activity had been held advisable of late, in view of certain extraditions.

And Sotcher's discourse at the Red Cow turned, lightly and easily, toward the question of explosives. Anybody could make them, he explained; nothing simpler, with care. And here he posed at large in the character of mysterious desperado, the wonder and admiration of all the Red Cow group. They should buy nitric acid, he said, of the strongest sort, and twice as much sulphuric acid. The shops where they sold photographic materials were best and cheapest for these things, and no questions

were asked. They should mix the acids, and then add gently, drop by drop, the best glycerine, taking care to keep everything cool. After which the whole lot must be poured into water, to stand for an hour. Then a thick, yellowish, oily stuff would be found to have sunk to the bottom, which must be passed through several pails of water to be cleansed: and there it was, a terrible explosive. You handled it with care, and poured it on brick-dust or dry sand, or anything of that sort that would soak it up, and then it could be used with safety to the operator.

The group listened with rapt attention, more than one pot stopping half way on its passage mouthwards. Then Jerry Shand wanted to know if Sotcher had ever blown up anything or anybody himself.

The missionary admitted that that glory had not been his. 'I'm one o' the teachers, me frien's—one o' the pioneers that goes to show the way for the active workers like you. I

on'y come to explain the principles an' set you in the right road to the social revolution, so as you may get yer rights at last. It's for you to act.'

Then he explained that action might be taken in two ways: either individually or by mutual aid in the group. Individual work was much to be preferred, being safer; but a particular undertaking often necessitated co-operation. But that was for the workers to settle as the occasion arose. However, one thing must be remembered. If the group operated, each man must be watchful of the rest; there must be no half measures, no timorousness; any comrade wavering, temporising, or behaving in any way suspiciously, must be straightway *suppressed.* There must be no mistake about that. It was desperate and glorious work, and there must be desperate and rapid methods both of striking and guarding. These things he made clear in his best conspirator's manner: with nods and scowls and a shaken fore-

finger, as of one accustomed to oversetting empires.

The men of the Red Cow group looked at each other, and spat thoughtfully. Then a comrade asked what had better be blown up first. Sotcher's opinion was that there was most glory in blowing up people, in a crowd or at a theatre. But a building was safer, as there was more chance of getting away. Of buildings, a public office was probably to be preferred —something in Whitehall, say. Or a bank—nobody seemed to have tried a bank: he offered the suggestion now. Of course there were not many public buildings in the East End, but possibly the group would like to act in their own neighbourhood: it would be a novelty, and would attract notice; the question was one for their own decision, independent freedom of judgment being the right thing in these matters. There were churches, of course, and the factories of the bloated capitalist. Particularly, he might

suggest the gas-works close by. There was a large gasometer abutting on the street, and probably an explosion there would prove tremendously effective, putting the lights out everywhere, and attracting great attention in the papers. That was glory.

Jerry Shand hazarded a remark about the lives of the men in the gas-works; but Sotcher explained that that was a trivial matter. Revolutions were never accomplished without bloodshed, and a few casual lives were not to be weighed in the balance against the glorious consummation of the social upheaval. He repeated his contention, when some weaker comrade spoke of the chance of danger to the operator, and repeated it with a proper scorn of the soft-handed pusillanimity that shrank from danger to life and limb in the cause. Look at the glory, and consider the hundred-fold vengeance on the enemy in the day to come! The martyr's crown was his who should die at the post of duty.

His eloquence prevailed: there were murmurs no more. 'Ere, tell us the name of the stuff agin,' broke out Gunno Polson, resolutely, feeling for a pencil and paper. 'Blimy, I'll make some to-morrer.'

He wrote down the name of the ingredients with much spelling. 'Thick, yuller, oily stuff, ain't it, wot you make?' he asked.

'Yus—an' keep it cool.'

The group broke up, stern and resolute, and Sotcher strode to his home exultant, a man of power.

For the next night or two the enthusiasm at the Red Cow was unbounded. There was no longer any questioning of principles or action — every man was an eager anarchist — strong and devoted in the cause. The little chemical experiment was going on well, Gunno Polson reported, with confident nods and winks. Sotcher repeated his discourse, as a matter of routine, to maintain the general ardour,

which had, however, to endure a temporary check as the result of a delicate inquiry of Snorkey's, as to what funds might be expected from headquarters. For there were no funds, said Sotcher, somewhat surprised at the question.

'Wot?' demanded Jerry Shand, opening his mouth and putting down his pipe: 'ain't we goin' to get nothink for all this?'

They would get the glory, Sotcher assured him, and the conciousness of striking a mighty blow at this, and that, and the other; but that was all. And instantly the faces of the group grew long.

'But,' said Old Baker, 'I thought all you blokes always got somethink from the — the committee?'

There was no committee, and no funds: there was nothing but glory, and victory, and triumph, and the social revolution, and things of that kind. For a little, the comrades looked at each other awkwardly, but they soon regained their cheerfulness, with zeal no whit abated. The sitting

closed with promises of an early gathering for the next night.

But when the next night came Sotcher was later than usual. ''Ullo,' shouted Gunno Polson, as he entered, ''ere you are at last. We've 'ad to do important business without you. See,' he added in a lower tone, ''ere's the stuff!' And he produced an old physic-bottle nearly full of a thick, yellowish fluid.

Sotcher started back half a pace, and slightly paled. 'Don't shake it,' he whispered hoarsely. 'Don't shake it, for Gawd's sake! . . . Wot—wotjer bring it 'ere for, like that? It's—it's awful stuff, blimy.' He looked uneasily about the group, and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. 'I—I thought you'd git the job over soon as the stuff was ready. . . . 'Ere, my Gawd!' he squeaked under his breath, 'don't put it down 'ard on the table like that. It's sich—sich awful stuff.' He wiped his forehead again, and, still standing, glanced once more apprehensively round the circle of impassive

faces. Then after a pause, he asked, with an effort: 'Wot—wotjer goin' to do now?'

'Blow up the bleed'n' gas-works, o' course,' answered Gunno Polson complacently. ''Ere's a penn'orth o' silver sand, an' a 'bacca canister, an' some wire, an' a big cracker with a long touch-paper, so as to stick out o' the canister-lid. That ought to set it auf, oughtn't it? 'Ere, you pour the stuff over the sand, doncher?' And he pulled out the cork and made ready to mix.

''Old on—'old on—don't! Wait a bit, for Gawd's sake!' cried Sotcher in a sweat of terror. 'You—you dunno wot awful stuff it is—s'elp me, you don't! You—you'll blow us all up if you don' keep it still. Y—you'll want some—other things. I'll go an'—'

But Jerry Shand stood grimly against the door. 'This 'ere conspiracy 'll 'ave to be gawn through proper,' he said. 'We can't 'ave no waverers nor blokes wot want to clear out in the middle of it, and p'r'aps go an' tell the

p'lice. Them sort we 'as to *suppress*, see? There's all the stuff there, me lad, an' you know it. Wot's more, it's you as is got to put it up agin the gas-works an' set it auf.'

The hapless Sotcher turned a yellower pallor and asked faintly: 'Me? Wy me?'

'All done reg'lar and proper,' Jerry replied, ''fore you come. We voted it—by ballot, all square. If you'd 'a' come earlier you'd 'a' 'ad a vote yerself.'

Sotcher pushed at Jerry's shoulder despairingly. 'I won't, I won't!' he gasped. 'Lemme go—it ain't fair—I wasn't 'ere—lemme go!'

'None o' yer shovin', young man,' said Jerry severely. 'None o' yer shovin', else I'll 'ave to punch you on the jore. You're a bleed'n' nice conspirator, you are. Its pretty plain we can't depend on you, an' you know wot that means, —eh? Doncher? You're one o' the sort as 'as to be suppressed, that's wot it means. 'Ere, 'ave a drink o' this 'ere beer, an' see if that can't put a little 'art in ye. You got to do it,

so you may as well do it cheerful. Snorkey, give 'im a drink.'

But the wretched revolutionary would not drink. He sank in a corner—the furthest from the table where Gunno Polson was packing his dreadful canister—a picture of stupefied affright.

Presently he thought of the bar—a mere yard of counter in an angle of the room, with a screen standing above it—and conceived a wild notion of escape by scrambling over. But scarce had he risen ere the watchful Jerry divined his purpose.

''Old 'im, Snorkey,' he said. 'Keep 'im in the corner. An' if 'e won't drink that beer, pour it over 'is 'ead.'

Snorkey obeyed gravely and conscientiously, and the bedraggled Sotcher, cowed from protest, whined and sobbed desolately.

When all was ready, Jerry Shand said: 'I s'pose it's no good askin' you to do it willin', like a man?'

'O, let me go, I—I ain't well—s'elp me, I

ain't. I—I might do it wrong—an'—an'—I'm a—a teacher—a speaker; not the active branch, s'elp me. Put it auf—for to-night—wait till to-morrer. I ain't well an'—an' you're very 'ard on me!'

'Desp'rit work, desp'rit ways,' Jerry replied laconically. 'You're be'avin' very suspicious, an' you're rebellin' agin the orders o' the group. There's only one physic for that, ain't there, in the rules? You're got to be suppressed. Question is 'ow. We'll 'ave to kill 'im quiet somehow,' he proceeded, turning to the group. 'Quiet an' quick. It's my belief 'e's spyin' for the p'lice, an' wants to git out to split on us. Question is 'ow to do for 'im?'

Sotcher rose, a staring spectre. He opened his mouth to call, but there came forth from it only a dry murmur. Hands were across his mouth at once, and he was forced back into the corner. One suggested a clasp-knife at the throat, another a stick in his neckerchief, twisted to throttling-point. But in the end it was settled

that it would be simpler, and would better destroy all traces, to despatch him in the explosion—to tie him to the canister, in fact.

A convulsive movement under the men's hands decided them to throw more beer on Sotcher's face, for he seemed to be fainting. Then his pockets were invaded by Gunno Polson, who turned out each in succession. 'You won't 'ave no use for money where you're goin',' he observed callously; 'besides, it 'ud be blowed to bits an' no use to nobody. Look at the bloke at Greenwich, 'ow 'is things was blowed away. 'Ullo! 'ere's two 'arf-crowns an' some tanners. Seven an' thrippence altogether, with the browns. This is the bloke wot 'adn't got no funds. This'll be divided on free an' equal principles to 'elp pay for that beer you're wasted. 'Old up, ol' man! Think o' the glory. P'r'aps you're all right, but it's best to be on the safe side, an' dead blokes can't split to the coppers. An' you mustn't forget the glory. You 'ave to shed blood in a revolution, an' a few odd lives

more or less don't matter—not a single damn. Keep your eye on the bleed'n' glory! They'll 'ave photos of you in the papers, all the broken bits in a 'eap, fac-similiar as found on the spot. Wot a comfort that'll be!'

But the doomed creature was oblivious—prostrate—a swooning heap. They ran a piece of clothes-line under his elbows, and pulled them together tight. They then hobbled his ankles, and took him among them through the alley and down the quiet street, singing and shouting their loudest as they went, in case he might sufficiently recover his powers to call for help. But he did not, and there in the shadow, at the foot of the great gasometer, they flung him down with a parting kick and a barbarous knock on the head, to keep him quiet for those few necessary moments. Then the murderous canister, bound with wire, was put in place; the extruding touch-paper was set going with a match; and the Red Cow Anarchists disappeared at a run, leaving their victim to his

fate. Presently the policeman on that beat heard a sudden report from the neighbourhood of the gas-works, and ran to see what it might mean.

The next morning Alfred Sotcher was charged at the Thames Police Court as a drunk and incapable. He had been found in a helpless state near the gas-works, and appeared to have been tied at the elbows and ankles by mischievous boys, who had also, it seemed, ignited a cracker near by where he lay. The divisional surgeon stated that he was called to the prisoner, and found him tearful and incoherent, and smelling strongly of drink. He complained of having been assaulted in a public-house, but could give no intelligible account of himself. A canister found by his side appeared to contain a mixture of sand and castor oil, but prisoner could not explain how it came there. The magistrate fined him five shillings, with the alternative of seven days, and as he had no money he was removed to the cells.

ON THE STAIRS

ON THE STAIRS

THE house had been 'genteel.' When trade was prospering in the East End, and the ship-fitter or block-maker thought it no shame to live in the parish where his workshop lay, such a master had lived here. Now, it was a tall, solid, well-bricked, ugly house, grimy and paintless in the joinery, cracked and patched in the windows: where the front door stood open all day long; and the womankind sat on the steps, talking of sickness and deaths and the cost of things; and treacherous holes lurked in the carpet of road-soil on the stairs and in the passage. For when eight families live in a house, nobody buys a door-mat, and the street was one of those streets that are always muddy.

It smelt, too, of many things, none of them pleasant (one was fried fish); but for all that it was not a slum.

Three flights up, a gaunt woman with bare forearms stayed on her way to listen at a door which, opening, let out a warm, fetid waft from a close sick-room. A bent and tottering old woman stood on the threshold, holding the door behind her.

'An' is 'e no better now, Mrs Curtis?' the gaunt woman asked, with a nod at the opening.

The old woman shook her head, and pulled the door closer. Her jaw waggled loosely in her withered chaps: 'Nor won't be; till 'e's gone.' Then after a certain pause, ''E's goin',' she said.

'Don't doctor give no 'ope?'

'Lor' bless ye, I don't want to ast no doctors,' Mrs Curtis replied, with something not unlike a chuckle. 'I've seed too many on 'em. The boy's a-goin', fast; I can see that. An' then' —she gave the handle another tug, and

whispered — 'he's been called.' She nodded amain. 'Three seprit knocks at the bed-head las' night; an' I know what *that* means!'

The gaunt woman raised her brows, and nodded. 'Ah, well,' she said, 'we all on us comes to it some day, sooner or later. An' it's often a 'appy release.'

The two looked into space beyond each other, the elder with a nod and a croak. Presently the other pursued, 'E's been a very good son, ain't 'e?'

'Ay, ay,—well enough son to me,' responded the old woman, a little peevishly; 'an' I'll 'ave 'im put away decent, though there's on'y the Union for me after. I can do that, thank Gawd!' she added, meditatively, as chin on fist she stared into the thickening dark over the stairs.

'When I lost my pore 'usband,' said the gaunt woman, with a certain brightening, 'I give 'im a 'ansome funeral. 'E was a Odd-feller, an' I got twelve pound. I 'ad a oak caufin an' a open 'earse. There was a kerridge for the

fam'ly an' one for 'is mates—two 'orses each, an' feathers, an' mutes; an' it went the furthest way round to the cimitry. "Wotever 'appens, Mrs Manders," says the undertaker, "you'll feel as you're treated 'im proper; nobody can't reproach you over that." An' they couldn't. 'E was a good 'usband to me, an' I buried 'im respectable.'

The gaunt woman exulted. The old, old story of Manders's funeral fell upon the other one's ears with a freshened interest, and she mumbled her gums ruminantly. 'Bob'll 'ave a 'ansome buryin', too,' she said. 'I can make it up, with the insurance money, an' this, an' that. On'y I dunno about mutes. It's a expense.'

In the East End, when a woman has not enough money to buy a thing much desired, she does not say so in plain words; she says the thing is an 'expense,' or a 'great expense.' It means the same thing, but it sounds better. Mrs Curtis had reckoned her resources, and

found that mutes would be an 'expense.' At a cheap funeral mutes cost half-a-sovereign and their liquor. Mrs Manders said as much.

'Yus, yus, 'arf-a-sovereign,' the old woman assented. Within, the sick man feebly beat the floor with a stick. 'I'm a-comin,' she cried shrilly; 'yus, 'arf-a-sovereign, but it's a lot, an' I don't see 'ow I'm to do it—not at present.' She reached for the door-handle again, but stopped and added, by after-thought, 'Unless I don't 'ave no plooms.'

'It 'ud be a pity not to 'ave plooms. I 'ad—'

There were footsteps on the stairs: then a stumble and a testy word. Mrs Curtis peered over into the gathering dark. 'Is it the doctor, sir?' she asked. It was the doctor's assistant; and Mrs Manders tramped up to the next landing as the door of the sick-room took him in.

For five minutes the stairs were darker than ever. Then the assistant, a very young man, came out again, followed by the old woman

with a candle. Mrs Manders listened in the upper dark. 'He's sinking fast,' said the assistant. 'He *must* have a stimulant. Dr Mansell ordered port wine. Where is it?' Mrs Curtis mumbled dolorously. 'I tell you he *must* have it,' he averred with unprofessional emphasis (his qualification was only a month old). 'The man can't take solid food, and his strength must be kept up somehow. Another day may make all the difference. Is it because you can't afford it?' 'It's a expense—sich a expense, doctor,' the old woman pleaded. 'An' wot with 'arf-pints o' milk an'—' She grew inarticulate, and mumbled dismally.

'But he must have it, Mrs Curtis, if it's your last shilling: it's the only way. If you mean you absolutely haven't the money—' And he paused a little awkwardly. He was not a wealthy young man—wealthy young men do not devil for East End doctors—but he was conscious of a certain haul of sixpences at nap the night before; and, being inexperienced,

he did not foresee the career of persecution whereon he was entering at his own expense and of his own motion. He produced five shillings: 'If you absolutely haven't the money, why—take this and get a bottle—good: not at a public-house. But mind, *at once*. He should have had it before.'

It would have interested him, as a matter of coincidence, to know that his principal had been guilty of the self-same indiscretion—even the amount was identical—on that landing the day before. But, as Mrs Curtis said nothing of this, he floundered down the stair and out into the wetter mud, pondering whether or not the beloved son of a Congregational minister might take full credit for a deed of charity on the proceeds of sixpenny nap. But Mrs Curtis puffed her wrinkles, and shook her head sagaciously as she carried in her candle. From the room came a clink as of money falling into a teapot. And Mrs Manders went about her business.

The door was shut, and the stair a pit of blackness. Twice a lodger passed down, and up and down, and still it did not open. Men and women walked on the lower flights, and out at the door, and in again. From the street a shout or a snatch of laughter floated up the pit. On the pavement footsteps rang crisper and fewer, and from the bottom passage there were sounds of stagger and sprawl. A demented old clock buzzed divers hours at random, and was rebuked every twenty minutes by the regular tread of a policeman on his beat. Finally, somebody shut the street-door with a great bang, and the street was muffled. A key turned inside the door on the landing, but that was all. A feeble light shone for hours along the crack below, and then went out. The crazy old clock went buzzing on, but nothing left that room all night. Nothing that opened the door. . . .

When next the key turned, it was to Mrs Manders's knock, in the full morning; and soon

the two women came out on the landing together, Mrs Curtis with a shapeless clump of bonnet. 'Ah, 'e's a lovely corpse,' said Mrs Manders. 'Like wax. So was my 'usband.'

'I must be stirrin',' croaked the old woman, 'an' go about the insurance an' the measurin' an' that. There's lots to do.'

'Ah, there is. 'Oo are you goin' to 'ave,—Wilkins? I 'ad Wilkins. Better than Kedge, *I* think: Kedge's mutes dresses rusty, an' their trousis is frayed. If you was thinkin' of 'avin' mutes—'

'Yus, yus,'—with a palsied nodding—'I'm a-goin' to 'ave mutes: I can do it respectable, thank Gawd!'

'And the plooms?'

'Ay, yus, and the plooms too. They ain't sich a great expense, after all.'

SQUIRE NAPPER

SQUIRE NAPPER

I

BILL NAPPER was a heavy man of something between thirty-five and forty. His moleskin trousers were strapped below the knees, and he wore his coat loose on his back, with the sleeves tied across his chest. The casual observer set him down a navvy, but Mrs Napper punctiliously made it known that he was 'in the paving'; which meant that he was a pavior. He lived in Canning Town, and was on a footpath job at West Ham (Allen was the contractor) when he won and began to wear the nickname 'Squire.'

Daily at the stroke of twelve from the neighbouring church, Bill Napper's mates let drop

rammer, trowel, spade, and pick, and turned toward a row of basins, tied in blue-and-red handkerchiefs, and accompanied of divers tin cans with smoky bottoms. Bill himself looked toward the street corner for the punctual Polly bearing his own dinner fresh and hot; for home was not far, and Polly, being thirteen, had no school now.

One day Polly was nearly ten minutes late. Bill, at first impatient, grew savage, and thought wrathfully on the strap on its nail by the kitchen-dresser. But at the end of the ten minutes Polly came, bringing a letter as well as the basin-load of beef and cabbage. A young man had left it, she said, after asking many ill-mannered questions. The letter was addressed 'W. Napper, Esq.,' with a flourish; the words, 'By hand,' stood in the corner of the envelope; and on the flap at the back were the embossed characters 'T. & N.' These things Bill Napper noted several times over, as he turned the letter about in his hand.

'Seems to me you'll 'ave to open it after all,' said one of Bill's mates; and he opened it, setting back his hat as a preparation to serious study. The letter was dated from Old Jewry, and ran thus:—

'*re* B. NAPPER *deceased.*

'DEAR SIR,—We have a communication in this matter from our correspondents at Sydney, New South Wales, in respect to testamentary dispositions under which you benefit. We shall be obliged if you can make it convenient to call at this office any day except Saturday between two and four.—Your obedient servants,

'TIMS & NORTON.'

The dinner hour had gone by before the full inner meaning had been wrested from this letter. 'B. Napper deceased' Bill accepted, with a little assistance, as an announcement of the death of his brother Ben, who had gone to Australia nearly twenty years ago, and had been forgotten.

'Testamentary dispositions' nobody would tackle with confidence, although its distinct suggestion of biblical study was duly remarked. 'Benefit' was right enough, and led one of the younger men, after some thought, to the opinion that Bill Napper's brother might have left him something: a theory instantly accepted as the most probable, although some thought it foolish of him not to leave it direct instead of authorising the interference of a lawyer, who would want to do Bill out of it.

Bill Napper put up his tools, and went home. There the missis put an end to doubt by repeating what the lawyer's clerk said: which was nothing more definite than that Bill had been 'left a bit'; and the clerk only acknowledged so much when he had satisfied himself, by sinuous questionings, that he had found the real legatee. He further advised the bringing of certain evidence on the visit to the office. Thus it was plain that the Napper fortunes were in good case, for, as 'a bit' means money

all the world over, the thing was clearly no worthless keepsake.

II

On the afternoon of the next day, Bill Napper, in clean moleskins and black coat, made for Old Jewry. On mature consideration he had decided to go through it alone. There was not merely one lawyer, which would be bad enough, but two of them in a partnership; and to take the missis, whose intellects, being somewhat flighty, were quickly divertible by the palaver of which a lawyer was master, would be to distract and impede his own faculties. A male friend might not have been so bad, but Bill could not call to mind one quite cute enough to be of any use, and in any case such a friend would have to be paid for the loss of his day's work. Moreover, he might imagine himself to hold a sort of

interest in the proceeds. So Bill Napper went alone.

Having waited the proper time without the bar in the clerk's office, he was shown into a room where a middle-aged man sat at a writing-table. There was no other lawyer to be seen. This was a stratagem for which Bill Napper was not prepared. He looked suspiciously about the room, but without discovering anything that looked like a hiding-place. Plainly there were two lawyers, because their names were on the door and on the letter itself; and the letter said *we*. Why one should hide it was hard to guess, unless it were to bear witness to some unguarded expression. Bill Napper resolved to speak little, and not loud.

The lawyer addressed him affably, inviting him to sit. Then he asked to see the papers that Bill had brought. These were an old testimonial reciting that Bill had been employed 'with his brother Benjamin' as a boy in a brick-field, and had given satisfaction; a letter

from a parish guardian, the son of an old employer of Bill's father, certifying that Bill was his father's son and his brother's brother; copies of the birth registry of both Bill and his brother, procured that morning; and a letter from Australia, the last word from Benjamin, dated eighteen years back. These Bill produced in succession, keeping a firm grip on each as he placed it beneath the lawyer's nose. The lawyer behaved somewhat testily under this restraint, but Bill knew better than to let the papers out of his possession, and would not be done.

When he had seen all—'Well, Mr Napper,' said the lawyer, rather snappishly (obviously he was balked), 'these things seem all right, and with the inquiries I have already made I suppose I may proceed to pay you the money. It is a legacy of three hundred pounds. Your brother was married, and I believe his business and other property goes to his wife and children. The money is intact, the estate paying legacy duty and expenses. In cases of this sort there

is sometimes an arrangement for the amount to be paid a little at a time as required; that, however, I judge, would not be an arrangement to please you. I hope, at any rate, you will be able to invest the money in a profitable way. I will draw a cheque.'

Three hundred pounds was beyond Bill Napper's wildest dreams. But he would not be dazzled out of his caution. Presently the lawyer tore the cheque from the book and pushed it across the table with another paper. He offered Bill a pen, pointing with his other hand at the bottom of the second paper, and saying, 'This is the receipt. Sign just there, please.'

Bill took up the cheque, but made no movement toward the pen. 'Receipt?' he grunted softly; 'receipt wot for? I ain't 'ad no money.'

'There's the cheque in your hand—the same thing. It's an order to the bank to hand you the amount—the usual way of paying money in business affairs. If you would rather have

the money paid here, I can send a clerk to the bank to get it. Give me the cheque.'

But again Bill was not to be done. The lawyer, finding him sharper than he expected, now wanted to get this tricky piece of paper back. So Bill only grinned at him, keeping a good hold of the cheque. The lawyer lost his temper. 'Why, damn it,' he said, 'you're a curious person to deal with. D'ye want the money and the cheque too?'

He rang a bell twice, and a clerk appeared. 'Mr Dixon,' said the lawyer, 'I have given this person a cheque for three hundred pounds. Just take him round to the bank, and get it cashed. Let him sign the receipt at the bank. I suppose,' he added, turning to Bill, 'that you won't object to giving a receipt when you get the money, eh?'

Bill Napper, conscious of his victory, expressed his willingness to do the proper thing at the proper time, and went out with the clerk. At the bank there was little difficulty, except at

the clerk's advice to take the money chiefly in notes, which instantly confirmed Bill in a determination to accept nothing but gold. When all was done, and the three hundred sovereigns, carefully counted over for the third and fourth time, were stowed in small bags about his person, Bill, much relieved after his spell of watchfulness, insisted on standing the clerk a drink.

'Ah,' he said, 'all you City lawyers an' clurks are pretty bleed'n' sharp, I know, but you ain't done me, an' *I* don't bear no malice. 'Ave wot you like—'ave wine or a six o' Irish—I ain't goin' to be stingy. I'm goin' to do it open an' free, I am, an' set a example to men o' property.'

III

Bill Napper went home in a hansom, ordering a barrel of beer on the way. One of the chief comforts of affluence is that you may

have beer in by the barrel; for then Sundays and closing times vex not, and you have but to reach the length of your arm for another pot whenever moved thereunto. Nobody in Canning Town had beer by the barrel except the tradesmen, and for that Bill had long envied the man who kept shop. And now, at his first opportunity, he bought a barrel of thirty-six gallons.

Once home with the news, and Canning Town was ablaze. Bill Napper had come in for three thousand, thirty thousand, three hundred thousand—any number of thousands that were within the compass of the gossip's command of enumeration. Bill Napper was called 'W. Napper, Esq.'—he was to be knighted—he was a long-lost baronet—anything. Bill Napper came home in a hansom—a brougham—a state coach.

Mrs Napper went that very evening to the Grove at Stratford to buy silk and satin, green, red and yellow—cutting her neighbours dead, right and left. And by the next morning tradesmen had sent circulars and samples of goods.

Mrs Napper was for taking a proper position in society, and a house in a fashionable part—Barking Road, for instance, or even East India Road, Poplar; but Bill would none of such foolishness. He wasn't proud, and Canning Town was quite good enough for him. This much, though, he conceded: that the family should take a whole house of five rooms in the next street, instead of the two rooms and a cellule upstairs now rented.

That morning Bill lit his pipe, stuck his hands in his pockets, and strolled as far as his job. 'Wayo, squire,' shouted one of the men as he approached. ''Ere comes the bleed'n' toff,' remarked another.

''Tcheer 'tcheer, mates,' Bill responded, calmly complacent. 'I'm agoin' to wet it.' And all the fourteen men left their paving for the beer-house close by. The foreman made some demur, but was helpless, and ended by coming himself. 'Now then, gaffer,' said Bill, 'none o' your sulks. No one ain't agoin' to stand out of a drink o' mine

—unless 'e wants to fight. As for the job—damn the job! I'd buy up fifty jobs like that 'ere and not stop for the change. You send the guv'nor to me if *'e* says anythink: unnerstand? You send 'im to *me*.' And he laid hands on the foreman, who was not a big man, and hauled him after the others.

They wetted it for two or three hours, from many quart pots. Then there appeared between the swing doors the wrathful face of the guv'nor.

The guv'nor's position was difficult. He was only a small master, and but a few years back had been a working mason. This deserted job was his first for the parish, and by contract he was bound to end it quickly under penalty. Moreover, he much desired something on account that week, and must stand well with the vestry. On the other hand, this was a time of strikes, and the air was electrical. Several large and successful movements had quickened a spirit of restlessness in the neighbourhood, and no master was sure of his men. Some slight was

fancied, something was not done as it should have been done from the point of view of the workshop, and there was a strike, picketing, and bashing. Now, the worst thing that could have happened to the guv'nor at this moment was one of those tiny, unrecorded strikes that were bursting out weekly and daily about him, with the picketing of his two or three jobs. Furious, therefore, as he was, he dared not discharge every man on the spot. So he stood in the door, and said: 'Look here, I won't stand this sort of thing—it's a damn robbery. I'll—'

'That's all right, ol' cock,' roared Bill Napper, reaching toward the guv'nor. 'You come 'an 'ave a tiddley. I'm a bleed'n' millionaire meself now, but I ain't proud. What, you won't?'—for the guv'nor, unenthusiastic, remained at the door—'You're a sulky old bleeder. These 'ere friends o' mine are 'avin' 'arf a day auf at my expense: unnerstand? My expense. I'm a-payin' for their time, if you dock 'em; an' I can give *you* a bob, me fine feller, if you're 'ard up. See?'

The guv'nor addressed himself to the foreman. 'What's the meaning o' this, Walker?' he said. 'What game d'ye call it?'

Bill Napper, whom a succession of pots had made uproarious, slapped the foreman violently on the shoulder. 'This 'ere's the gaffer,' he shouted 'E's all right. 'E come 'ere 'cos 'e couldn't 'elp 'isself. I made 'im come, forcible. Don't you bear no spite agin' the gaffer, d'y'ear? 'E's my mate, is the gaffer; an' I could buy you up, forty times, s'elp me—but I ain't proud. An' you're a bleed'n' gawblimy slackbaked . . .'

'Well,' said the guv'nor to the assembled company, but still ignoring Bill, 'don't you think there's been about enough of this?'

A few of the men glanced at one another, and one or two rose. 'Awright, guv'nor,' said one, 'we're auf.' And two more echoed, 'Awright, guv'nor,' and began to move away.

'Ah!' said Bill Napper, with disgust, as he turned to finish his pot, 'you're a blasted nigger-

driver, you are. An' a sulky beast,' he added as he set the pot down. 'Never mind,' he pursued, '*I'm* awright, an' I ain't a 'arf-paid kerb-whacker no more, under you.'

'You was a damn sight better kerb-whacker than you are a millionaire,' the guv'nor retorted, feeling safer now that his men were getting back to work.

'None o' your lip,' replied Bill, rising and reaching for a pipe-spill: 'none o' your lip, you work'us stone-breaker.' Then, turning with a sudden access of fury, 'I'll knock yer face off, blimy!' he shouted, and raised his fist.

'Now, then, none o' that here, please,' cried the landlord from behind the bar; unto whom Bill Napper, with all his wonted obedience in that quarter, answered only, 'All right, guv'nor,' and subsided.

Left alone, he soon followed the master-pavior and his men through the swing doors, and so went home. In his own street, observing two small boys in the prelusory stages of a fight, he

put up sixpence by way of stakes, and supervised the battle from the seat afforded by a convenient window-sill. After that he bought a morning paper, and lay upon his bed to read it, with a pipe and a jug; for he was beginning a life of leisure and comfort, wherein every day should be a superior Sunday.

IV

Thus far the outward and visible signs of the Napper wealth were these: the separate house; the barrel of beer; a piano—not bought as a musical instrument, but as one of the visible signs; a daily paper, also primarily a sign; the bonnets and dresses of the missis; and the perpetual possession of Bill Napper by a varying degree of fuddlement. An inward and dissembled sign was a regiment, continually reinforced, of mostly empty bottles, in a cupboard

kept sacred by the missis. And the faculties of that good lady herself experienced a fluctuating confusion from causes not always made plain to Bill: for the money was kept in the bedroom chest of drawers, and it was easy to lay hands on a half-sovereign as required without unnecessary disturbance.

Now and again Bill Napper would discuss the abstract question of entering upon some investment or business pursuit. Land had its advantages; great advantages; and he had been told that it was very cheap just now, in some places. Houses were good, too, and a suitable possession for a man of consideration. Not so desirable on the whole, however, as Land. You bought your Land and—well there it was, and you could take things easily. But with Houses there was rent to collect, and repairs to see to and so forth. It was a vastly paying thing for any man with capital to be a Merchant; but there was work even in that, and you had to be perpetually on guard against sharp chaps

in the City. A public-house, suggested by one of his old mates on the occasion of wetting it, was out of the question. There was tick, and long hours, and a sharp look-out, and all kinds of trouble, which a man with money would be a fool to encounter. Altogether, perhaps, Land seemed to be the thing: although there was no need to bother now, and plenty of time to turn things over, even if the matter were worth pondering at all, when it was so easy for a man to live on his means. After all, to take your boots off, and lie on the bed with a pipe and a pot and the paper was very comfortable, and you could always stroll out and meet a mate, or bring him in when so disposed.

Of an evening the Albert Music Hall was close at hand, and the Queen's not very far away. And on Sundays and Saturday afternoons Bill would often take a turn down by the dock gates, or even in Victoria Park, or Mile End Waste, where there were speakers of all sorts. At the dock gates it was mostly Labour and

Anarchy, but at the other places there was a fine variety; you could always be sure of a few minutes of Teetotalism, Evangelism, Atheism, Republicanism, Salvationism, Socialism, Anti-Vaccinationism, and Social Purity, with now and again some Mormonism or another curious exotic. Most of the speakers denounced something, and if the denunciations of one speaker were not sufficiently picturesque and lively, you passed on to the next. Indeed you might always judge afar off where the best denouncing was going on, by the size of the crowds, at least until the hat went round.

It was at Mile End Waste that a good notion occurred to Bill Napper. He had always vastly admired the denunciations of one speaker —a little man, shabbier, if anything, than most of the others, and surpassingly tempestuous of antic. He was an unattached orator, not confining himself to any particular creed, but denouncing whatever seemed advisable, considering the audience and circumstances. He was

always denouncing something somewhere, and was ever in a crisis that demanded the circulation of a hat. Bill esteemed this speaker for his versatility as well as for the freshness of his abuse, and Bill's sudden notion was to engage him for private addresses.

The orator did not take kindly to the proposal at first, strongly suspecting something in the nature of 'guy' or 'kid'; but a serious assurance of a shilling for an occasional hour and the payment of one in advance brought him over. After this Squire Napper never troubled to go to Mile End Waste. He sat at ease in his parlour, with his pot on the piano, while the orator, with another pot on the mantelpiece, stood up and denounced to order. 'Tip us the Teetotal an' Down-with-the-Public-'Ouse,' Bill would request, and the orator (his name was Minns) would oblige in that line till most of the strong phrases had run out, and had begun to recur. Then Bill would say, 'Now come the Rights o' Labour caper.' Whereupon

Minns would take a pull at the pot, and proceed to denounce Capital, Bill Napper applauding or groaning at the pauses provided for those purposes. And so on with whatever subjects appealed to the patron's fancy. It was a fancy that sometimes put the orator's invention to grievous straits; but for Bill the whole performance was peculiarly privileged and dignified. For to have an orator gesticulating and speechifying all to oneself, on one's own order and choice of subject, is a thing not given to all men.

One day Minns turned up (not having been invited) with a friend. Bill did not take to the friend. He was a lank-jawed man with a shifty eye, who smiled as he spoke, and showed a top row of irregular and dirty teeth. This friend, Minns explained, was a journalist — a writer of newspapers; and between them they had an idea, which idea the friend set forth. Everybody, he said, who knew the history of Mr Napper admired his sturdy independence and democratic simplicity. He was of the people

and not ashamed of it. ('Well, no, I ain't proud,' Bill interjected, wondering what was coming.) With all the advantages of wealth, he preferred to remain one of the people, living among them plainly, conforming to their simple habits, and sympathising with their sorrows. ('This chap,' thought Bill, 'wants to be took on to hold forth turn about with the other, and he's showing his capers; but I ain't on it.') It was the knowledge of these things, so greatly to Mr Napper's honour, that had induced Minns and Minns's friend to place before him a means by which he might do the cause of toiling humanity a very great service. A new weekly paper was wanted — wanted very badly: a paper that should rear its head on behalf of the down-trodden toilers, and make its mighty voice heard with dread by the bloated circles of Class and Privilege. That paper would prove a marvellously paying investment to its proprietor, bringing him enormous profits every week. He would have a

vast fortune in that paper alone, besides the glory and satisfaction of striking the great blow that should pave the way to the emancipation of the Masses and the destruction of the vile system of society whose whole and sole effect was the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the Grasping Few. Being professionally disengaged at present, he (the speaker), in conjunction with his friend Minns, had decided to give Mr Napper the opportunity of becoming its proprietor.

Bill was more than surprised: he was also a little bewildered. 'What,' he said, after two draws of his pipe, 'd'ye mean you want me to go in the printin' line?'

That was not at all necessary. The printing would be done by contract. Mr Napper would only have to find the money. The paper, with a couple of thousand pounds behind it — or even one thousand (Minns's friend read a difficulty in Bill's face)—would be established for ever. Even five hundred would do, and many

successful papers had been floated with no more than a couple of hundred or so. Suppose they said just a couple of hundred to go on with, till the paper found its legs and began to pay? How would that do?

Bill Napper smoked a dozen whiffs. Then he said: 'An' what should I 'ave to do with the two 'undred pound? Buy anythink?'

Not directly that, the promoters explained. It would finance the thing—just finance it.

''Oo'd 'ave the money then?'

That was perfectly simple. It would simply be handed over to Minns and his friend, and they would attend to all the details.

Bill Napper continued to smoke. Then, beginning with a slight chuckle at the back of his throat, he said: 'W'en I got my money, I went to a lawyer's for it. There was two lawyers—one layin' low. There was two fust-rate lawyers an' a lot o' clurks—City clurks—an' a bank an' all. An' they couldn't 'ave me, not for a single farden—not a farden, try an' fiddle as they would.

. . . Well, arter that, it ain't much good *you* a-tryin' it on, is it?' And he chuckled again, louder.

Minns was indignant, and Minns's friend was deeply hurt. Both protested. Bill Napper laughed aloud. 'Awright, you'll do,' he said; 'you'll do. My 'abits may be simple, but they ain't as simple as all that. Ha—ha! 'Ere, 'ave a drink—you ain't done no 'arm, an' I ain't spiteful. Ha—ha!'

It was on an evening a fortnight after this that, as Bill Napper lay, very full of beer and rather sleepy, on the bed—the rest of his household being out of doors—a ladder was quietly planted against the outer wall from the back-yard. Bill heard nothing until the window, already a little open, was slowly pushed up, and from the twilight outside a head and an arm plunged into the thicker darkness of the room, and a hand went feeling along the edge of the chest of drawers by the window. Bill rolled over on the

bed, and reached from the floor one of a pair of heavy iron-set boots. Taking the toe in his right hand, and grasping the footrail of the bedstead with his left, he raised himself on his knees, and brought the boot-heel down heavily on the intruding head. There was a gasp, and the first breath of a yell, and head, arm, shoulders, and body vanished with a bump and a rattle. Bill Napper let the boot fall, dropped back on the bed, and took no further heed.

Neither Minns nor his friend ever came back again, but for some time after, at Victoria Park, Minns, inciting an outraged populace to rise and sweep police and army from the earth, was able to point to an honourable scar on his own forehead, the proof and sign of a police bludgeoning at Tower Hill—or Trafalgar Square.

V

Things went placidly on for near ten months.

Many barrels of beer had come in full and been sent empty away. Also the missis had got a gold watch and divers new bonnets and gowns, some by gift from Bill, some by applying privily to the drawer. Her private collection of bottles, too, had been cleared out twice, and was respectable for the third time. Everybody was not friendly with her, and one bonnet had been torn off her head by a neighbour who disliked her airs.

So it stood when, on a certain morning, Bill, being minded to go out, found but two shillings in his pocket. He called upstairs to the missis, as was his custom in such a pass, asking her to fetch a sovereign or two when she came down; and, as she was long in coming, he went up himself. The missis left the room hurriedly, and Bill, after raking out every corner of the drawer (which he himself had not opened for some time) saw not a single coin. The missis had no better explanation than that there must have been thieves in the house some time lately: a sug-

gestion deprived of some value by the subsequent protest that Bill couldn't expect money to last for ever, and that he had had the last three days ago. In the end there was a vehement row, and the missis was severely thumped.

The thumping over, Bill Napper conceived a great idea. Perhaps after all the lawyers had done him by understating the amount his brother had left. It might well have been five hundred pounds—a thousand pounds—anything. Probably it was, and the lawyers had had the difference. Plainly, three hundred pounds was a suspiciously small sum to inherit from a well-to-do brother. He would go to the lawyers and demand the rest of his money. He would not reveal his purpose till he saw the lawyers face to face, and then he would make his demand suddenly, so that surprise and consternation should overwhelm and betray them. He would give them to understand that he had complete evidence of the whole swindle. In any case he could lose nothing. He went, after carefully

preparing his part, and was turned out by a policeman.

'After that,' mused Squire Napper, going home, 'I suppose I'd better see about getting a job at Allen's again. He can't but make me gaffer, considering I've been a man of property.'

'A POOR STICK'

'A POOR STICK'

MRS JENNINGS (or Jinnins, as the neighbours would have it) ruled absolutely at home, when she took so much trouble as to do anything at all there—which was less often than might have been. As for Robert her husband, he was a poor stick, said the neighbours. And yet he was a man with enough of hardihood to remain a non-unionist in the erectors' shop at Maidment's all the years of his service; no mean test of a man's fortitude and resolution, as many a sufferer for independent opinion might testify. The truth was that Bob never grew out of his courtship-blindness. Mrs Jennings governed as she pleased, stayed out or came home as she chose, and

cooked a dinner or didn't, as her inclination stood. Thus it was for ten years, during which time there were no children, and Bob bore all things uncomplaining: cooking his own dinner when he found none cooked, and sewing on his own buttons. Then of a sudden came children, till in three years there were three; and Bob Jennings had to nurse and to wash them as often as not.

Mrs Jennings at this time was what is called rather a fine woman: a woman of large scale and full development; whose slatternly habit left her coarse black hair to tumble in snake-locks about her face and shoulders half the day; who, clad in half-hooked clothes, bore herself notoriously and unabashed in her fullness; and of whom ill things were said regarding the lodger. The gossips had their excuse. The lodger was an irregular young cabinet-maker, who lost quarters and halves and whole days; who had been seen abroad with his landlady, what time Bob Jennings was putting the children to bed at home; who on his frequent holidays

brought in much beer, which he and the woman shared, while Bob was at work. To carry the tale to Bob would have been a thankless errand, for he would have none of anybody's sympathy, even in regard to miseries plain to his eye. But the thing got about in the workshop, and there his days were made bitter.

At home things grew worse. To return at half-past five, and find the children still undressed, screaming, hungry and dirty, was a matter of habit: to get them food, to wash them, to tend the cuts and bumps sustained through the day of neglect, before lighting a fire and getting tea for himself, were matters of daily duty. 'Ah,' he said to his sister, who came at intervals to say plain things about Mrs Jennings, 'you shouldn't go for to set a man agin 'is wife, Jin. Melier do'n' like work, I know, but that's nach'ral to 'er. She ought to married a swell 'stead o' me; she might 'a' done easy if she liked, bein' sich a fine gal; but she's good-'arted, is Melier; an' she can't 'elp bein' a bit thought-

less.' Whereat his sister called him a fool (it was her customary good-bye at such times), and took herself off.

Bob Jennings's intelligence was sufficient for his common needs, but it was never a vast intelligence. Now, under a daily burden of dull misery, it clouded and stooped. The base wit of the workshop he comprehended less, and realised more slowly, than before; and the gaffer cursed him for a sleepy dolt.

Mrs Jennings ceased from any pretence of housewifery, and would sometimes sit—perchance not quite sober—while Bob washed the children in the evening, opening her mouth only to express her contempt for him and his establishment, and to make him understand that she was sick of both. Once, exasperated by his quietness, she struck at him, and for a moment he was another man. 'Don't do that, Melier,' he said, 'else I might forget myself.' His manner surprised his wife: and it was such that she never did do that again.

So was Bob Jennings: without a friend in the world, except his sister, who chid him, and the children, who squalled at him: when his wife vanished with the lodger, the clock, a shade of wax flowers, Bob's best boots (which fitted the lodger), and his silver watch. Bob had returned, as usual, to the dirt and the children, and it was only when he struck a light that he found the clock was gone.

'Mummy tooked ve t'ock,' said Milly, the eldest child, who had followed him in from the door, and now gravely observed his movements. 'She tooked ve t'ock an' went ta-ta. An' she tooked ve fyowers.'

Bob lit the paraffin lamp with the green glass reservoir, and carried it and its evil smell about the house. Some things had been turned over and others had gone, plainly. All Melier's clothes were gone. The lodger was not in, and under his bedroom window, where his box had stood, there was naught but an oblong patch of conspicuously clean wall-paper. In a muddle of

doubt and perplexity, Bob found himself at the front door, staring up and down the street. Divers women-neighbours stood at their doors, and eyed him curiously; for Mrs Webster, moralist, opposite, had not watched the day's proceedings (nor those of many other days) for nothing, nor had she kept her story to herself.

He turned back into the house, a vague notion of what had befallen percolating feebly through his bewilderment. 'I dunno—I dunno,' he faltered, rubbing his ear. His mouth was dry, and he moved his lips uneasily, as he gazed with aimless looks about the walls and ceiling. Presently his eyes rested on the child, and 'Milly,' he said decisively, 'come an' 'ave yer face washed.'

He put the children to bed early, and went out. In the morning, when his sister came, because she had heard the news in common with everybody else, he had not returned. Bob Jennings had never lost more than two quarters in his life, but he was not seen at the workshop all this day. His sister stayed in the house, and

in the evening, at his regular homing-time, he appeared, haggard and dusty, and began his preparations for washing the children. When he was made to understand that they had been already attended to, he looked doubtful and troubled for a moment. Presently he said: 'I ain't found 'er yet, Jin; I was in 'opes she might 'a' bin back by this. I—I don't expect she'll be very long. She was alwis a bit larky, was Melier; but very good-'arted.'

His sister had prepared a strenuous lecture on the theme of 'I told you so'; but the man was so broken, so meek, and so plainly unhinged in his faculties, that she suppressed it. Instead, she gave him comfortable talk, and made him promise in the end to sleep that night, and take up his customary work in the morning.

He did these things, and could have worked placidly enough had he but been alone; but the tale had reached the workshop, and there was no lack of brutish chaff to disorder him. This the decenter men would have no part in,

and even protested against. But the ill-conditioned kept their way, till, at the cry of 'Bell O!' when all were starting for dinner, one of the worst shouted the cruellest gibe of all. Bob Jennings turned on him and knocked him over a scrap-heap.

A shout went up from the hurrying workmen, with a chorus of 'Serve ye right,' and the fallen joker found himself awkwardly confronted by the shop bruiser. But Bob had turned to a corner, and buried his eyes in the bend of his arm, while his shoulders heaved and shook.

He slunk away home, and stayed there: walking restlessly to and fro, and often peeping down the street from the window. When, at twilight, his sister came again, he had become almost cheerful, and said with some briskness: 'I'm agoin' to meet 'er, Jin, at seven. I know where she'll be waitin'.'

He went upstairs, and after a little while came down again in his best black coat, carefully smoothing a tall hat of obsolete shape

with his pocket-handkerchief. 'I ain't wore it for years,' he said. 'I ought to 'a' wore it—it might 'a' pleased 'er. She used to say she wouldn't walk with me in no other—when I used to meet 'er in the evenin', at seven o'clock.' He brushed assiduously, and put the hat on. 'I'd better 'ave a shave round the corner as I go along,' he added, fingering his stubbly chin.

He received as one not comprehending his sister's persuasion to remain at home; but when he went she followed at a little distance. After his penny shave he made for the main road, where company-keeping couples walked up and down all evening. He stopped at a church, and began pacing slowly to and fro before it, eagerly looking out each way as he went.

His sister watched him for nearly half an hour, and then went home. In two hours more she came back with her husband. Bob was still there, walking to and fro.

''Ullo, Bob,' said his brother-in-law; 'come

along 'ome an' get to bed, there's a good chap. You'll be awright in the mornin'.'

'She ain't turned up,' Bob complained, 'or else I've missed 'er. This is the reg'lar place—where I alwis used to meet 'er. But she'll come to-morrer. She used to leave me in the lurch sometimes, bein' nach'rally larky. But very good-'arted, mindjer; very good-'arted.'

She did not come the next evening, nor the next, nor the evening after, nor the one after that. But Bob Jennings, howbeit depressed and anxious, was always confident. 'Somethink's prevented 'er to-night,' he would say, 'but she'll come to-morrer. . . . I'll buy a blue tie to-morrer —she used to like me in a blue tie. I won't miss 'er to-morrer. I'll come a little earlier.'

So it went. The black coat grew ragged in the service, and hobbledehoys, finding him safe sport, smashed the tall hat over his eyes time after time. He wept over the hat, and straightened it as best he might. Was she coming? Night after night, and night and night. But to-morrow. . . .

A CONVERSION

A CONVERSION

THERE are some poor criminals that never have a chance: circumstances are against them from the first, as they explain, with tears, to sympathetic mission-readers. Circumstances had always been against Scuddy Lond, the gun. The word gun, it may be explained, is a friendly synonym for thief.

His first name was properly James, but that had been long forgotten. 'Scuddy' meant nothing in particular, was derived from nothing, and was not, apparently, the invention of any distinct person. Still, it was commonly his only name, and most of his acquaintances had also nicknames of similarly vague origin. Scuddy was a man of fine feelings, capable of a most

creditable hour of rapturous misery after hearing, perhaps at a sing-song, 'Put Me in my Little Bed,' or any other ditty that was rank enough in sentiment: wherefore the mission-readers never really despaired of him. He was a small, shabby man of twenty-six, but looking younger; with a run-away chin, a sharp, yellow face, and tremulously sly eyes; with but faint traces of hair on his face, he had a great deal of it, straight and ragged and dirty, on his head.

Scuddy Lond's misfortunes began early. Temptation had prevailed against him when he was at school, but that was nothing. He became errand boy in a grocer's shop, and complications with the till brought him, a howling penitent, to the police court. Here, while his mother hid her head in the waiting-room, he set forth the villainy of older boys who had prompted him to sin, and got away with no worse than a lecture on the evils of bad company. So that a philanthropist found him a better situation at a distance, where the evil influence could no longer move

him. Here he stayed a good while—longer than some who had been there before him, but who had to leave because of vanishing postal orders. Nevertheless, the postal orders still went, and in the end he confessed to another magistrate, and fervently promised to lead a better life if his false start were only forgiven. Betting, he protested, was this time the author of his fall; and as that pernicious institution was clearly to blame for the unhappy young man's ruin, the lamenting magistrate let him off with a simple month in consideration of his misfortune and the intercession of his employer, who had never heard of the grocer and his till.

After his month Scuddy went regularly into business as a lob-crawler: that is to say, he returned to his first love, the till: not narrowly to any individual till, but broad-mindedly to the till as a general institution, to be approached in unattended shops by stealthy grovelling on the belly. This he did until he perceived the greater security and comfort of waiting without while

a small boy did the actual work within. From this, and with this, he ventured on peter-claiming: laying hands nonchalantly on unconsidered parcels and bags at railway stations, until a day when, bearing a fat portmanteau, he ran against its owner by the door of a refreshment bar. This time the responsibility lay with Drink. Strong Drink, he declared, with deep emotion, had been his ruin; he dated his downfall from the day when a false friend persuaded him to take a Social Glass; he would still have been an honest, upright, self-respecting young man but for the Cursed Drink. From that moment he would never touch it more. The case was met with three months with hard labour, and for all that Scuddy Lond had so clearly pointed out the culpability of Drink, he had to do the drag himself. But the mission-readers were comforted: for clearly there was hope for one whose eyes were so fully opened to the causes of his degradation.

After the drag, Scuddy for long made a

comfortable living, free from injurious overwork, in the several branches of lob-crawling and peter-claiming, with an occasional deviation into parlour-jumping. It is true that this last *did* sometimes involve unpleasant exertion when the window was high and the boy heavy to bunk up; and it was necessary, at times, to run. But Scuddy was out of work, and hunger drove him to anything, so long as it was light and not too risky. And it is marvellous to reflect how much may be picked up in the streets and at the side-doors of London and the suburbs without danger or vulgar violence. And so Scuddy's life went on, with occasional misfortunes in the way of a moon, or another drag, or perhaps a sixer. And the mission-readers never despaired, because the real cause was always hunger, or thirst, or betting, or a sudden temptation, or something quite exceptional—never anything like real, hardened, unblushing wickedness; and the man himself was always truly penitent. He made such touching references to

his innocent childhood, and was so grateful for good advice or anything else you might give him.

One bold attempt Scuddy made to realise his desire for better things. He resolved to depart from his evil ways and to become a nark—a copper's nark—which is a police spy, or informer. The work was not hard, there was no imprisonment, and he would make amends for the past. But hardly had he begun his narking when some of the Kate Street mob dropped on him in Brick Lane, and bashed him full sore. This would never do: so once more implacable circumstance drove him to his old courses. And there was this added discomfort: that no boy would parlour-jump nor dip the lob for him. Indeed they bawled aloud, 'Yah, Scuddy Lond the copper's nark!' So that the hand of all Flower and Dean Street was against him. Scuddy grew very sad.

These and other matters were heavy upon his heart on an evening when, with nothing in his pockets but the piece of coal that he carried

for luck, he turned aimlessly up Baker's Row. Things were very bad: it was as though the whole world knew him—and watched. Shopkeepers stood frowningly at their doors. People sat defiantly on piles of luggage at the railway stations, and there was never a peter to touch for. All the areas were empty, and there were no side-doors left unguarded, where, failing the more desirable wedge, one might claim a pair or two of daisies put out for cleaning. All the hundred trifling things that commonly come freely to hand in a mile or two of streets were somehow swept out of the world's economy; and Scuddy tramped into Baker's Row in melting mood. Why were things so hard for some and so easy for others? It was not as though he were to blame—he, a man of feeling and sentiment. Why were others living comfortable lives unvexed of any dread of the police? And apart from that, why did other gonophs get lucky touches for half a century of quids at a time, while he! . . . But there: the world was

one brutal oppression and he was its most pitiable victim; and he slunk along, dank with the pathos of things.

At a corner a group was standing about a woman, whose voice was uplifted to a man's accompaniment on a stand-accordion. Scuddy listened. She sang, with a harsh tremble:

'—An' sang a song of 'ome, sweet 'ome,
The song that reached my 'art.
'Ome, 'ome, sweet, sweet 'ome,
She sang the song of 'ome, sweet 'ome,
The song that reached my 'art.'

Here, indeed, was something in tune with Scuddy's fine feelings. He looked up. From the darkening sky the evening star winked through the smoke from a factory chimney. From anear came an exquisite scent of saveloys. Plaintive influences all. He tried to think of 'ome himself—of 'ome strictly in the abstract, so that it might reach his 'art. He stood for some minutes torpid and mindless, oozing with sentiment: till the song ended, and he went on. Fine feelings—fine!

He crossed the road, and took a turning. A lame old woman sat in a recess selling trotters, where a dark passage led back to a mission-hall. About the opening a man hovered—fervent, watchful,—and darted forth on passers-by. He laid his hand on Scuddy's shoulder, and said: 'My dear friend, will you come in an' 'ear the word of the Lord Jesus Christ?'

Scuddy turned: the sound of an harmonium and many strenuous voices came faintly down the passage. It was his mood. Why not give his fine feelings another little run? He would: he would go in.

'Trotters!' quavered the lame old woman, looking up wistfully. 'Two a penny! Two a penny!' But no: he went up the passage, and she turned patiently to her board.

Along the passage the singing grew louder, and burst on his ears unchecked as he pushed open the door at the end:

> '—*'Oosoever will, 'oosoever will,*
> *Send the proclamation over vale an' 'ill;*

'Tis a lovin' Father calls the wand'rer 'ome,
'Oosoever will may come!'

A man by the door knew him at once for a stranger, and found him a seat. The hymn went quavering to an end, and the preacher in charge, a small, bright-eyed man with rebellious hair and a surprisingly deep voice, announced that Brother Spyers would offer a prayer.

The man prayed with his every faculty. He was a sturdy, red-necked artisan, great of hand and wiry of beard: a smith, perhaps, or a bricklayer. He spread his arms wide, and, his head thrown back, brought forth, with passion and pain, his fervid, disordered sentences. As he went on, his throat swelled and convulsed in desperate knots, and the sweat hung thick on his face. He called for grace, that every unsaved soul there might come to the fold and believe that night. Or if not all, then some—even a few. That at least one, only one, poor soul might be plucked as a brand from the burning. And as he flung together, with clumsy travail, his end-

less, formless, unconsidered vehemences of uttermost Cockney, the man stood transfigured, admirable.

From here and there came deep amens. Then more, with gasps, groans and sobs. Scuddy Lond, carried away luxuriously on a tide of grievous sensation, groaned with the others. The prayer ended in a chorus of ejaculations. Then there was a hymn. Somebody stuffed an open hymn-book into Scuddy's hand, but he scarce saw it. Abandoning himself to the mesmeric influence of the many who were singing about him, he plunged and revelled in a debauch of emotion. He heard, he even joined in; but understood nothing, for his feelings filled him to overflowing.

'I 'ave a robe: 'tis resplendent in w'iteness,
Awaitin' in glory my wonderin' view:
Oh, w'en I receive it, all shinin' in brightness,
Dear friend, could I see you receivin' one too!
For you I am prayin'! For you I am prayin'!
For you I am prayin', I'm prayin' for you.'

The hymn ceased; all sat down, and the preacher

began his discourse: quietly at first, and then, though in a different way, with all the choking fervour of the man who had prayed. For the preacher was fluent as well as zealous, and his words, except when emotion stayed them, poured in a torrent. He preached faith—salvation in faith—declaiming, beseeching, commanding. 'Come—come! Now is the appointed time! Only believe—only come! Only—only come!' To impassioned, broken entreaty he added sudden command and the menace of eternity, but broke away pitifully again in urgent pleadings, pantings, gasps; pointing above, spreading his arms abroad, stretching them forth imploringly. Come, only come!

Sobs broke out in more than one place. A woman bowed her head and rocked, while her shoulders shook again. Brother Spyers's face was alight with joy. A tremor, a throe of the senses ran through the assembly as through a single body.

The preacher, nearing his peroration, rose to

a last frenzy of adjuration. Then, ending in a steadier key, he summoned any to stand forth who had found grace that night.

His bright, strenuous eyes were on the sobbers, charging them, drawing them. First rose the woman who had bowed her head. Her face uncovered but distorted and twitching, still weeping but rapt and unashamed, she tottered out between the seats, and sank at last on the vacant form in front. Next a child, a little maid of ten, lank-legged and outgrown of her short skirts, her eyes squeezed down on a tight knot of pocket-handkerchief, crying wildly, broken-heartedly, sobbed and blundered over seat-corners and toes, and sat down forlorn and solitary, at the other end of the form. And after her came Scuddy Lond.

Why, he knew not—nor cared. In the full enjoyment of a surfeit of indefinite emotion, tearful, rapturous, he had accepted the command put on him by the preacher, and he had come forth, walking on clouds, regenerate, compact of fine

feelings. There was a short prayer of thanks, and then a final hymn:

'Ring the bells of 'eaven, there is joy to-day,
For a soul returnin' from the wild!'

Scuddy felt a curious equable lightness of spirits—a serene cheerfulness. His emotional orgasm was spent, and in its place was a numb calm, pleasant enough.

'—Glory! glory! 'ow the angels sing—
Glory! glory! 'ow the loud 'arps ring!
'Tis the ransomed army, like a mighty sea,
Pealin' forth the anthem of the free!'

The service ended. The congregation trooped forth into the evening; but Scuddy sat where he was, for the preacher wanted a few words with his converts ere he would let them go. He shook hands with Scuddy Lond, and spoke with grave, smiling confidence about his soul. Brother Spyers also shook hands with him and bespoke his return on Sunday.

In the cool air of the empty passage, Scuddy's ordinary faculties began to assort themselves;

still in an atmosphere of calm cheer. Fine feelings—fine. And as he turned the piece of coal in his pocket, he reflected that, after all, the day had not been altogether unlucky —not in every sense a blank. Emerging into the street, he saw that the lame old woman, who was almost alone in view, had risen on her crutch and turned her back to roll her white cloth over her remaining trotters. On the ledge behind stood her little pile of coppers, just reckoned. Scuddy Lond's practised eye took the case in a flash. With two long tip-toed steps he reached the coppers, lifted them silently, and hurried away up the street. He did not run, for the woman was lame and had not heard him. No: decidedly the day had not been blank. For here was a hot supper.

'ALL THAT MESSUAGE'

'ALL THAT MESSUAGE'

I

'ALL that messuage dwelling-house and premises now standing on part of the said parcel of ground' was the phrase in the assignment of lease, although it only meant Number Twenty-seven Mulberry Street, Old Ford, containing five rooms and a wash-house, and sharing a dirty front wall with the rest of the street on the same side. The phrase was a very fine one, and, with others more intricate, lent not a little to the triumph and the perplexity the transaction filled old Jack Randall withal. The business was a conjunction of purchase and mortgage, whereby old Jack Randall, having thirty pounds of his own, had,

after half-an-hour of helpless stupefaction in a solicitor's office in Cornhill, bought a house for two hundred and twenty pounds, and paid ten pounds for stamps and lawyer's fees. The remaining two hundred pounds had been furnished by the Indubitable Perpetual Building Society, on the security of a mortgage; and the loan, with its interest, was to be repaid in monthly instalments of two pounds and fourpence during twelve years. Thus old Jack Randall designed to provide for the wants and infirmities of age; and the outright purchase, he argued, was a thing of mighty easy accomplishment. For the house let at nine shillings a week, which was twenty-three pounds eight shillings a year; and the mortgage instalments, with the ground rent of three pounds a year, only came to twenty-seven pounds four, leaving a difference of three pounds sixteen, which would be more than covered by a saving of eighteenpence a week: certainly not a difficult saving for a man with a regular job and

no young family, who had put by thirty pounds in little more than three years. Thus on many evenings old Jack Randall and his wife would figure out the thing, wholly forgetting rates and taxes and repairs.

Old Jack stood on the pavement of Cornhill, and stared at the traffic. When he remembered that Mrs Randall was by his side he said, 'Well, mother, we done it;' and his wife replied, 'Yus, fa', you're a lan'lord now.' Hereat he chuckled, and began to walk eastward. For to be a landlord is the ultimate dignity. There is no trouble, no anxiety in the world if you are a landlord; and there is no work. You just walk round on Monday mornings (or maybe you even drive in a trap), and you collect your rents: eight and six, or nine shillings, or ten shillings, as the case may be. And there you are! It is better than shopkeeping, because the money comes by itself; and it is infinitely more genteel. Also, it is better than having money in a bank and drawing interest; because the

house cannot run away as is the manner of directors, nor dissolve into nothingness as is the way of banks. And here was he, Jack Randall, walking down Leadenhall Street a landlord. He mounted a tramcar at Aldgate, and all things were real.

II

Old Jack had always been old Jack since at fourteen young Jack had come 'prentice in the same engine-turner's shop. Young Jack was a married man himself now, at another shop; and old Jack was near fifty, and had set himself toward thrift. All along Whitechapel Road, Mile End Road, and Bow Road he considered the shops and houses from the tram-roof, madly estimating rents and values. Near Bow Road end he and his wife alighted, and went inspecting Twenty-seven Mulberry Street once more. Old

Jack remarked that the scraper was of a different shape from that he had carried in his mind since their last examination; and he mentioned it to Mrs Randall, who considered the scraper of fact rather better than the scraper of memory. They walked to and fro several times, judging the door and three windows from each side of the street, and in the end they knocked, with a purpose of reporting the completed purchase. But the tenant's wife, peeping from behind a blind, and seeing only the people who had already come spying about the house some two or three times, retired to the back and went on with her weekly washing.

They waited a little, repeated the knock, and then went away. The whole day was 'off,' and a stroll in the Tower Hamlets Cemetery was decided on. Victoria Park was as near, but was not in the direction of home. Moreover, there was less interest for Mrs Randall in Victoria Park, because there were no funerals. In the cemetery, Mrs Randall solaced herself

and old Jack with the more sentimental among the inscriptions. In the poor part, whose miscellaneous graves are marked by mounds alone, they stopped to look at a very cheap funeral.

'Lor', Jack,' Mrs Randall said under her breath with a nudge, 'wot a common caufin! Why, the body's very nigh a-droppin' through the bottom!' The thin under-board had, in fact, a bulge. 'Pore chap! ain't it shockin'!'

The ignominy of a funeral with no feathers was a thing accepted of course, but the horror of a cheap coffin they had never realised till now. They turned away. In the main path they met the turgid funeral of a Bow Road bookmaker. After the dozen mourning coaches there were cars and pony traps, and behind these came a fag-end of carts and donkey-barrows. Ahead of all was the glazed hearse, with attendants in weepers, and by it, full of the pride of artistry, walked the undertaker himself.

'Now that,' said old Jack, 'is somethin' like

a caufin.' (It was heavy and polished and beset with bright fittings.) 'Ah,' sighed his missis, 'ain't it lovely!'

The hearse drew up at the chapel door, where the undertaker turned to the right-about and placidly surveyed the movements of his forces. Mrs Randall murmured again: 'Lovely—lovely!' and kept her eyes on the coffin. Then she edged gently up to the undertaker, and whispered: 'What would that kind o' caufin be called, mister?'

The undertaker looked at her from the sides of his eyes and answered briskly: 'Two-inch polished oak solid extry brass fittin's.' Mrs Randall returned to old Jack's side and repeated the words. 'That must cost a lot,' she said. 'What a thing, though, to be certain you won't be buried in a trumpery box like that other! Ah, it's well to be rich.'

Old Jack gazed on the coffin, and thought. Surely a landlord, if anybody, was entitled to indulge in an expensive coffin? All day he

had nursed a fancy that some small indulgence, something a little heavier than usual in the matter of expense, would be proper to celebrate the occasion. But he reflected that his savings were gone and his pockets no fuller than had always been their Wednesday wont: though, of course, in that matter the future would be different. The bearers carried the coffin into the chapel, and Mrs Randall turned away among the graves. Old Jack put his hands in his pockets, and, looking at the ground, said: 'That was a nobby caufin, mother, wasn't it?' Whereunto Mrs Randall murmured: 'Lovely—lovely!' yet again.

Old Jack walked a little further and asked: 'Two-inch polished oak, 'e said, didn't 'e?'

'Solid, an' extry brass fittin's; beautiful!'

'I'll remember it. That's what you shall 'ave if it 'appens you go fust. There!' And old Jack sat on the guard-chain of a flowery grave with the air of one giving a handsome order.

'Me? Git out! Look at the expense.'

'Matter o' circumstances. Look at Jenkins's Gardens. Jenkins was a bench-'and at the Limited; got 'is 'ouses one under another through building s'ieties. That there caufin 'ud be none too dear for *'im*. We're beginnin'; an' I promise you that same, if you'd like it.'

'Like it!' the missis ejaculated. 'Course I should. Wouldn't you?'

'Wy, yus. Any one 'ud prefer somethin' a bit nobby; an' thick.'

And the missis reciprocated old Jack's promise, in case he died first: if a two-inch polished oak solid could be got for everything she had to offer. And, tea-time approaching, they made well pleased for home.

III

In two days old Jack was known as a landlord all about. On the third day, which was

Saturday, young Jack called to borrow half a sovereign, but succeeded only to the extent of five shillings: work was slack with him, and three days of it was all he had had that week. This had happened before, and he had got on as best he could; but now, with a father buying house-property, it was absurd to economise for lack of half a sovereign. When he brought the five shillings home, his wife asked why he had not thrown them at his father's head: a course of procedure which, young Jack confessed, had never occurred to his mind. 'Stingy old 'unks!' she scolded. 'A-goin' about buyin' 'ouses, an' won't lend 'is own son ten shillin's! Much good may all 'is money do 'im with 'is 'ateful mean ways!' This was the beginning of old Jack's estrangement from his relatives. For young Jack's missis expressed her opinion in other places, and young Jack was soon ready to share it: rigidly abstaining from another attempt at a loan, though he never repaid the five shillings.

In the course of the succeeding week two of his shopmates took old Jack aside at different times to explain that the loan of a pound or two would make the greatest imaginable difference to the whole course of their future lives, while the temporary absence of the money would be imperceptible to a capitalist like himself. When he roundly declared that he had as few loose sovereigns as themselves, he was set down an uncommon liar as well as a wretched old miser. This was the beginning of old Jack's unpopularity in the workshop.

IV

He took a half-day off to receive the first week's rent in state, and Mrs Randall went with him. He showed his written authority from the last landlord, and the tenant's wife paid over the sum of nine shillings, giving him at the

same time the rent-book to sign and a slip of written paper. This last was a week's notice to terminate the tenancy.

'We're very well satisfied with the 'ouse,' the tenant's wife said (she was a painfully clean, angular woman, with a notable flavour of yellow soap and scrubbing-brush about her), 'but my 'usband finds it too far to get to an' from Albert Docks mornin' and night. So we're goin' to West 'Am.' And she politely ejected her visitors by opening the door and crowding them through it.

The want of a tenant was a contingency that old Jack had never contemplated. As long as it lasted it would necessitate the setting by of ten and sixpence a week for the building society payments and the ground-rent. This was serious: it meant knocking off some of the butcher's meat, all the beer and tobacco, and perhaps a little firing. Old Jack resolved to waste no more half-days in collecting, but to send his missis. On the following Monday,

therefore, while the tenant's wife kept a sharp eye on the man who was piling a greengrocer's van with chairs and tables, Mrs Randall fixed a 'To Let' bill in the front window. In the leaves of the rent-book she found another thing of chagrin: to wit, a notice demanding payment of poor, highway, and general rates to the amount of one pound eighteen and sevenpence. Now, no thought of rates and taxes had ever vexed the soul of old Jack. Of course, he might have known that his own landlord paid the rates for his house; but, indeed, he had never once thought of the thing, being content with faithfully paying the rent, and troubling no more about it. That night was one of dismal wakefulness for old Jack and his missis. If he had understood the transaction at the lawyer's office, he would have known that a large proportion of the sum due had been allowed him in the final adjustment of payment to the day; and if he had known something of the ways of rate-collecting, he would have understood that pay-

ment was not expected for at least a month. As it was, the glories of lease-possession grew dim in his eyes, and a landlord seemed a poor creature, spending his substance to keep roofs over the heads of strangers.

V

On Wednesday afternoon a man called about taking the house, and returned in the evening, when old Jack was home. He was a large-featured, quick-eyed man, with a loud, harsh voice and a self-assertive manner. Quickly old Jack recognised him as a speaker he had heard at certain street-corners: a man who was secretary, or delegate, or that sort of thing, to something that old Jack had forgotten.

He began with the announcement: 'I am Joe Parsons:' delivered with a stare for emphasis, and followed by a pause to permit assimilation.

Old Jack had some recollection of the name, but it was indefinite. He wondered whether or not he should address the man as 'sir,' considering the street speeches, and the evident importance of the name. But then, after all, he was a landlord himself. So he only said 'Yus?'

'I am Joe Parsons,' the man repeated; 'and I'm looking for a 'ouse.'

There was another pause, which lasted till old Jack felt obliged to say something. So he said 'Yus?' again.

'I'm looking for a 'ouse,' the man repeated, 'and if we can arrange things satisfactory, I might take yours.'

Mr Joe Parsons was far above haggling about the rent, but he had certain ideas as to painting and repairs that looked expensive. In the end old Jack promised the paint a touch-up, privily resolving to do the work himself in his evenings. And on the whole, Mr Joe Parsons was wonderfully easy to come to terms with, considering his eminent public character. And

anything in the nature of a reference in his case would have been absurd. As himself observed, his name was enough for that.

VI

Old Jack did the painting, and the new tenant took possession. When Mrs Randall called for the first week a draggle-tailed little woman with a black eye meekly informed her that Mr Parsons was not at home, and had left no money nor any message as to the rent. This was awkward, because the first building society instalment would be due before next rent-day —to say nothing of the rates. But it would never do to offend Mr Parsons. So the money was scraped together by heroic means (the missis produced an unsuspected twelve and sixpence from a gallipot on the kitchen dresser), and the first instalment was paid.

Mrs Randall called twice at Mulberry Street next rent-day, but nobody answered her knocks. Old Jack, possessed by a misty notion, born of use, that rent was constitutionally demandable only on Monday morning, called no more for a week. But on Thursday evening a stout little stranger, with a bald head which he wiped continually, came to the Randalls to ask if the tenant of Twenty-seven Mulberry Street was Mr Joe Parsons. Assured that it was, he nodded, said 'Thanks! that's all,' wiped his head again, and started to go. Then he paused, and 'Pay his rent regular?' he asked. Old Jack hesitated. 'Ah, thought so,' said the little stranger. 'He's a wrong 'un. *I've* got a bit o' paper for 'im.' And he clapped on his hat with the handkerchief in it and vanished.

VII

Old Jack felt unhappy, for a landlord. He and the missis reproached themselves for not asking the little stranger certain questions; but he had gone. Next Monday morning old Jack took another half-day, and went to Mulberry Street himself. From appearances, he assured himself that a belief, entertained by his missis, that the upper part of his house was being sub-let, was well-founded. He watched awhile from a corner, until a dirty child kicked at the door, and it was opened. Then he went across and found the draggle-tailed woman who had answered Mrs Randall before, in every respect the same to look at, except that not one eye was black but two. Old Jack, with some abruptness, demanded his rent of her, addressing her as Mrs Parsons. Without disclaiming the name, she pleaded with meek uneasiness that Mr Parsons really wasn't at home, and she didn't

know when to expect him. At last, finding this ineffectual, she produced four and sixpence: begging him with increasing agitation to take that on account and call again.

Old Jack took the money, and called again at seven. Custom or law or what-not, he would wait for no Monday morning now. The door was open, and a group of listening children stood about it. From within came a noise of knocks and thuds and curses—sometimes a gurgle. Old Jack asked a small boy, whose position in the passage betokened residence, what was going forward. 'It's the man downstairs,' said the boy, 'a-givin' of it to 'is wife for payin' awy the lodgers' rent.'

At this moment Mr Joe Parsons appeared in the passage. The children, who had once or twice commented in shouts, dispersed. 'I've come for my rent,' said old Jack.

Mr Joe Parsons saw no retreat. So he said, 'Rent? Ain't you 'ad it? I don't bother about things in the 'ouse. Come again when my wife's in.'

'She is in,' rejoined old Jack, 'an' you've been a-landin' of 'er for payin' me what little she 'as. Come, you pay me what you owe me, and take a week's notice now. I want my house kep' respectable.'

Mr Joe Parsons had no other shift. 'You be damned,' he said. 'Git out.'

'What?' gasped old Jack—for to tell a landlord to get out of his own house! . . . . 'What?'

'Why git out. Y'ought to know better than comin' 'ere askin' for money you ain't earnt.'

'Ain't earnt? What d'ye mean?'

'What I say. Y'aint earnt it. It's you blasted lan'lords as sucks the blood o' the workers. You go an' work for your money.'

Old Jack was confounded. 'Why—what—how d'ye think I can pay the rates, an' everythink?'

'I don't care. You'll *'ave* to pay 'em, an' I wish they was 'igher. They ought to be the same as the rent, 'an that 'ud do away with

fellers like you. Go on: you do your damdest an' get your rent best way you can.'

'But what about upstairs? You're lettin' it out an' takin' the rent there. I—'

'That's none o' your business. Git out, will ye?' They had gradually worked over the doorstep, and Randall was on the pavement. 'I sha'n't pay, an' I sha'n't go, an' ye can do what ye like; so it's no good your stoppin'—unless you want to fight. Eh—do ye?' And Mr Parsons put a foot over the threshold.

Old Jack had not fought for many years. It was low. For a landlord outside his own house it was, indeed, disgraceful. But it was quite dark now, and there was scarcely a soul in the street. Perhaps nobody would know, and this man deserved something for himself. He looked up the street again, and then, 'Well, I ain't so young as I was,' he said, 'but I won't disappoint ye. Come on.'

Mr Joe Parsons stepped within and slammed the door.

VIII

Old Jack went home less happy than ever. He had no notion what to do. Difficulties of private life were often discussed and argued out in the workshop, but there he had become too unpopular to ask for anything in the nature of sympathy or advice. Not only would he lend no money, but he refused to stand treat on rent days. Also, there was a collection on behalf of men on strike at another factory, to which he gave nothing; and he had expressed the strongest disapproval of an extension of that strike, and his own intention to continue working if it happened. For what would become of all his plans and his savings if his wages ceased? Wherefore there was no other man in the shop so unpopular as old Jack, and in a workshop unpopularity is a bad thing.

He called on a professional rent-receiver and seller-up. This man knew Mr Joe Parsons very

well. He never had furniture upon which a profitable distress might be levied. But if he took lodgers, and they were quiet people, something might be got out of them—if the job were made worth while. But this was not at all what old Jack wanted.

Soon after it occurred to him to ask advice of the secretary of the building society. This was a superficial young man, an auctioneer's clerk until evening, who had no disposition to trouble himself about matters outside his duties. Still, he went so far as to assure old Jack that turning out a tenant who meant to stay was not a simple job. If you didn't mind losing the rent it might be done by watching until the house was left ungarrisoned, getting in, putting the furniture into the street, and keeping the tenant out. With this forlorn hope old Jack began to spend his leisure about Mulberry Street: ineffectually, for Mrs Parsons never came out while he was there. Once he saw the man, and offered to forgive him the rent

if he would leave: a proposal which Mr Parsons received with ostentatious merriment. At this old Jack's patience gave out, and he punched his tenant on the ear. Whereat the latter, suddenly whitening in the face, said something about the police, and walked away at a good pace.

IX

The strike extended, as it was expected and designed to do. The men at old Jack's factory were ordered out, and came, excepting only old Jack himself. He was desperate. Since he had ventured on that cursed investment everything had gone wrong: but he would not lose his savings if mere personal risk would preserve them. Moreover, a man of fifty is not readily re-employed, once out; and as the firm was quite ready to keep one hand on to oil and see

that things were in order, old Jack stayed: making his comings and goings late to dodge the pickets, and approaching subtly by a railway-arch stable and a lane thereunto. It was not as yet a very great strike, and with care these things could be done. Still, he was sighted and chased twice, and he knew that if the strike lasted, and feeling grew hotter, he would be attacked in his own house. If only he could hold on through the strike, and by hook or crook keep the outgoings paid, he would attend to Mr Parsons afterward.

X

One Saturday afternoon, as Mrs Randall was buying greens and potatoes, old Jack, waiting without, strolled toward a crowd standing about a speaker. A near approach discovered the

speaker to be Mr Joe Parsons, who was saying:—

'—— strike pay is little enough at the time, of course, but don't forget what it will lead to! An' strike pay does very well, my frien's, when the party knows 'ow to lay it out, an' don't go passin' it on to the lan'lord. Don't give it away. When the lan'lord comes o' Monday mornin', tell 'im (polite as you like) that there's nothink for 'im till there's more for you. Let the lan'lord earn 'is money, like me an' you. Let the lan'lords pay a bit towards this 'ere strike as well as the other blaggards, the imployers. Lan'lords gits quite enough out o' you, my feller workers, when—'

'They don't git much out o' you!' shouted old Jack in his wrath; and then felt sorry he had spoken. For everybody looked at him, and he knew some of the faces.

'Ho!' rejoined the speaker, mincingly. 'There's a gent there as seems to want to address this 'ere meetin'. P'r'aps you'll 'ave

the kindness to step up 'ere, my friend, an' say wot you got to say plain.' And he looked full at old Jack, pointing with his finger.

Old Jack fidgeted, wishing himself out of it. 'You pay me what you owe me,' he growled sulkily.

'As this 'ere individual, after intruding 'isself on this peaceful meetin', ain't got anythink to say for 'isself,' pursued Mr Joe Parsons, 'I'll explain things for 'im. That's *my* lan'lord, that is: look at 'im! 'E comes 'angin' round my door waitin' for a chance to turn my pore wife an' children out o' 'ouse and 'ome. 'E follers me in the street an' tries to intimidate me. 'E comes 'ere, my feller workers, as a spy, an' to try an' poison your minds agin me as devotes my 'ole life to your int'rests. That's the sort o' man, that's the sort o' lan'lord *'e* is. But 'e's somethink more than a greedy, thievin', overfed lan'lord, my frien's, an' I'll tell you wot. 'E's a dirty, crawlin' blackleg; that's wot else 'e is. 'E's the on'y man as wouldn't come

out o' Maidment's; an' 'e's workin' there now, skulkin' in an' out in the dark — a dirty rat! Now you all know very well I won't 'ave nothink to do with any violence or intimidation. It's agin my principles, although I know there's very often great temptation, an' it's impossible to identify in a crowd, an' safe to be very little evidence. But this I will say, that when a dirty low rat, not content with fattenin' on starvin' tenants, goes an' takes the bread out o' 'is feller men's mouths, like that bleedin' blackleg—blackleg!—blackleg!—'

Old Jack was down. A dozen heavy boots were at work about his head and belly. In from the edge of the crowd a woman tore her way, shedding potatoes as she ran, and screaming; threw herself upon the man on the ground; and shared the kicks. Over the shoulders of the kickers whirled the buckle-end of a belt. 'One for the old cow,' said a voice.

XI

When a man is lying helpless on his back, with nothing in hand, he pays nothing off a building society mortgage, because, as his wife pawns the goods of the house, the resulting money goes for necessaries. To such a man the society shows no useless grace: especially when the secretary has a friend always ready to take over a forfeited house at forced sale price. So the lease of Twenty-seven vanished, and old Jack's savings with it.

And one day, some months later, old Jack, supported by the missis and a stick, took his way across the workhouse forecourt. There was a door some twenty yards from that directly before them, and two men came out of it, carrying a laden coffin of plain deal.

'Look there, Jack,' the missis said, as she checked her step; 'what a common caufin!' And indeed there was a distinct bulge in the bottom.

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